

stouffville comment

Time to pay piper with user fees

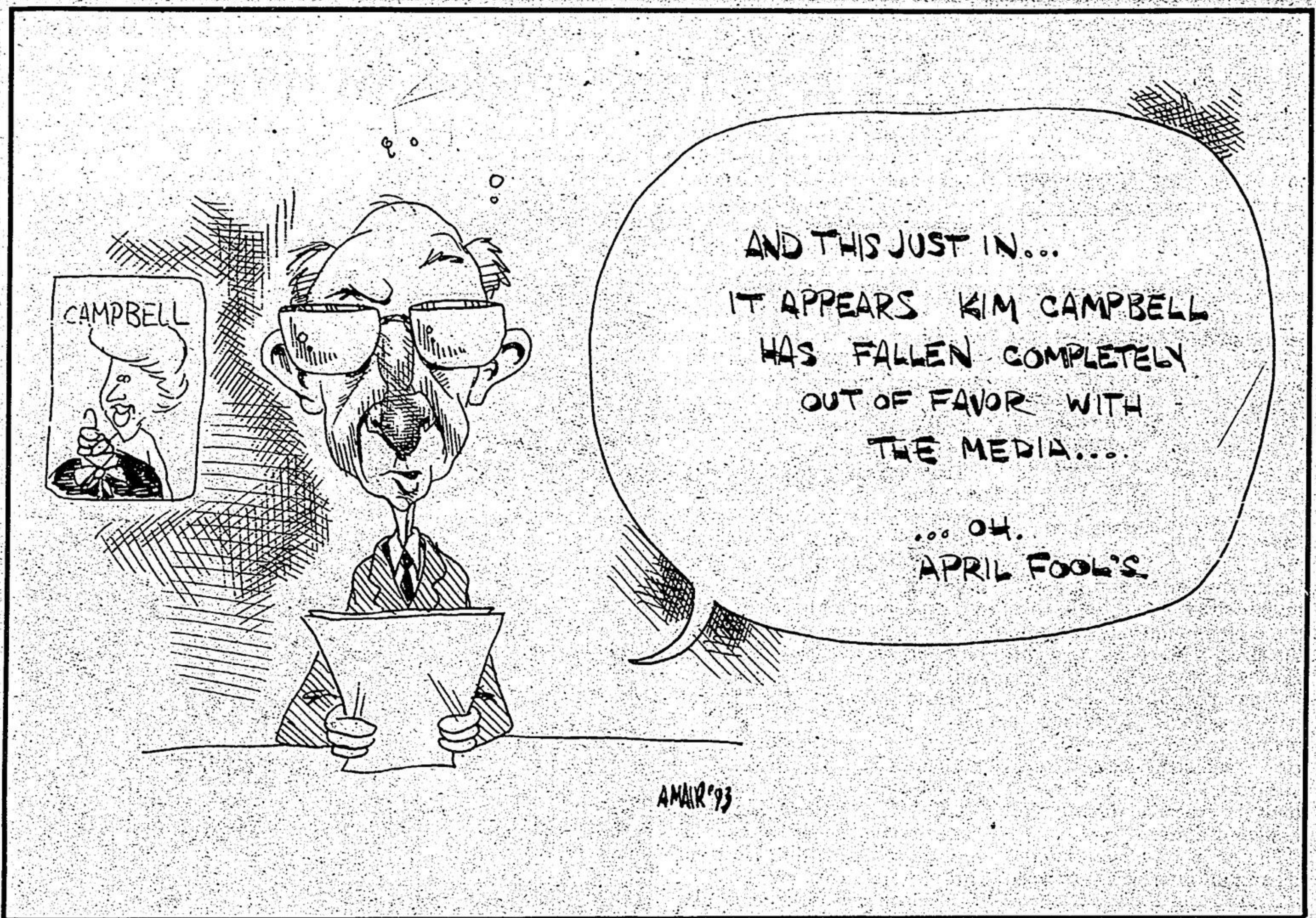
The time to pay the piper has arrived.

Groups using town facilities will be hit with user fees for the first time in 1994.

And while we can gripe about paying taxes and paying user fees at the same time, those to blame are not the staff at the Rec Centre, ball diamonds or swimming pool.

Activities simply can't be funded any longer without paying. Costs continue to rise, and yet there is no more money coming in. If we want facilities and groomed parkland, we are justly going to pay for them.

User fees are designed to offset the cost of taxing the general public for the benefit of those who use the facilities. It is the wave of the future, and while we all believe we pay too much as it is, there is the feeling that this is just the beginning.



An unwanted tenant that won't pay rent

Still more from the country notebook.

Had a run-in with my newest tenant this weekend.

Eating Sunday dinner in the dining room, I was acutely aware of a shadow moving behind me and some rather uncat-like rustling from above.

I whirled around and saw a bandit's mask staring back at me through the window. A huge raccoon was wiggling, upside down, from between the eaves and roof of my dining room. No longer daunted by alarmingly frequent bouts with nature's creatures, I went out the side door to confront the beast. At my approach, he quietly

climbed onto the roof, and stared at me. Shouts and demands for rent went unheeded as he sleepily walked to the point of the roof and down the other side.

I went in the house to put on my boots. As I was cursing, and zipping up my coat, a sudden realization that I had left the garbage unattended in the garage saw me scurrying out the front door.

We had often heard tales of how wily the raccoon can be. But I was not aware they were a magical creature. For no sooner did I have the screen door open, then I heard the unmistakable sound of cat food tins,



potato peelings and chicken wrappings being spread from stem to stern across the garage.

Out the door and into garage I went, armed with a cross country pole. But when I flicked on the garage light, I saw what I had expected - the remnants of two weeks worth of human con-

sumption littering my garage floor. And yet there was no sign of the bandit. I looked in the rafters, under the car, in the back of the precarious log pile, and all around the yard.

No raccoon. I listened for him, but nothing came across the breeze.

I went slightly befuddled back into house.

Twenty minutes later, my cats began to wail. Looking up, I saw the coon standing on its hind legs, grinning at me through the patio doors. The cats were right in front of the doors, but

he paid them little mind. He just sat there, grinning, and chewing on a chicken bone. My chicken bone. It is like one of those house guests who just don't know when to leave. You can cut them off, turn out the lights and yawn by the door, but they are still there.

Monday morning, the party was still going on.

And it seems to be picking up steam. Looking in the patio doors, two raccoons sat grinning up at me. And by the looks of the second one, more are on the way.

Storm left us shaken and stirred

They say you learn something new every day.

At March break, during what had been billed as a relaxing Stateside holiday, we discovered the meaning of 'Frost Heaves,' not to mention experiencing the dubious delights of driving headlong into a record-breaking blizzard. At 6.45 a.m. on Saturday we were on the road. Perhaps, the old man mused, we could beat the storm. "How can we beat it," I inquired, "if we're driving directly into it?"

The customs official at the American border assured us the storm was way down south and we'd be fine. No doubt he was a descendent of the individual who described the Titanic as unsinkable. By the time we arrived in the vicinity of our resort, we had driven through the kind of weather rarely seen outside a Hollywood disaster movie. It was then that I first spied the legend Frost



Heaves,' writ large at the bottom of the hill leading to our holiday haven.

Our horrendous drive through the storm of the century paled into insignificance when compared with the challenge of The Hill, a nine kilometre obstacle course consisting mostly of craters, bordered by occasional bits of buckled tarmac.

We got stuck two-thirds of the way up this natural disaster. By then, the meaning of 'Frost Heaves' was depressingly obvious. Abandoning the family charabanc, we were driven to the resort at breakneck speed by a friendly maniac in a clapped out

truck, the axles of which were beaten to death en route by the wildly undulating terrain.

We were deposited at last, both shaken and stirred, among the friends we were vacationing with, all of whom had undergone a similar initiation ritual.

Snowstorm horror stories were exchanged over their generously shared provisions, yours truly having failed entirely to grasp the magnitude of the storm which - to no one else's surprise - had caused all supermarkets to close before we arrived.

It turned out to be one of our most memorable, not to say hilarious, holidays, during which cars routinely got stuck on the hill from hell, skis got buried in snow drifts and every night was party time.

And when frost heaves in Laconia, New Hampshire this time next year, we want to be part of the reunion.

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