

# Opinion

Send your letters to the editor to 59 Albert St., Uxbridge L9P 1E5 or fax them to 852-4355

## Help spread Christmas around town

Amid the hustle of gift-buying, food preparation and all the festive activities that fill our calendars at this time of year, it is important to remember that there are many people who will not be rushing through a shopping mall, or stocking up on ham and plum pudding.

For the simple reason that they can't.

Canada is blessed in its level of poverty, compared to other countries. However, the number of people who will not be having any sort of celebration this Christmas is still astounding, and many of these people live in our own community.

There are many children who will not receive a



### Viewpoint

Andrew Mair

Christmas gift, and many more who will likely go hungry while the rest of us are sitting down to our enormous repasts.

And while we all may be thankful and count our blessings around the Christmas feast, there will likely be more food wasted, and scraped off our plates than many families see in the course of a day.

The Thanksgiving drives

have stocked the food bank shelves, but the need never ends. There are families in our town who meet with hardships all the time that are beyond the scope of the food banks' capabilities.

Charity and selflessness are a measure of the true spirit of Christmas.

If we are able to help bring one smile to the face of one child Christmas morning, or give a family a single thing to be thankful for, then we will have received a gift far more valuable than anything that comes in a box.

Fancy ribbon and wrapping paper, gifts, and a bountiful meal should only serve to remind us that Christmas is much more than all the trap-

pings. Christmas is the spirit of giving, of making the journey through life easier for those less fortunate.

If you or your group has done something to help those in need, let this newspaper know. We feel it is important that this spirit is fostered.

If you need assistance with a project to help the needy, let us know that as well. We'd be more than happy to publicize your efforts.

## We are living in weird times

America has the longest prison sentences in the West, yet the only condition they demonstrably cure is heterosexuality.

New York Times

We live in weird times, my friends. Consider the latest prison statistics from our neighbors south of the border. The statistics show that for the first time in history there are more than one million inmates behind bars in the USA.

One million jailbirds. But then, as our own C.D. Howe once scoffed "What's a million?"

I'll tell you what a million is. It's the entire population of Saskatchewan. It's two Winnipegs. Eight Thunder Bays. A million people is 28 sold out Blue Jay games at the SkyDome.

A million is a lot of people to have in jail. Especially for a country that likes to bill itself as The Land of the Free.

Just by way of contrast, let's pay a visit to a place Ronald Reagan once billed as the Evil Empire. Let's check out what's left of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Schisselburg Fortress might be a good place to begin our tour. It's a castle that squats on a wind-lashed island in the Baltic Sea just offshore from St. Petersburg.

It's a far cry from the Magic Castle at Disneyworld - and well it might be. Schisselburg has been a prison for most of the past 300 years. It was the Kingston Pen of Czarist Russia. Well, truth to tell, daily life at Schisselburg made a stretch in Kingston Pen look like an afternoon at a Presbyterian Strawberry Social.

A lot of Russian personae non grata went through the gates of Schisselburg. Not a one of them ever came out. Schisselburg had high walls, mean guards, a very efficient firing squad and a most commodious graveyard.

All of which would lead you to believe that modern day liberated Russians can hardly wait for the day when Schisselburg Prison is transformed into a Taco Bell Drive-Thru, right?

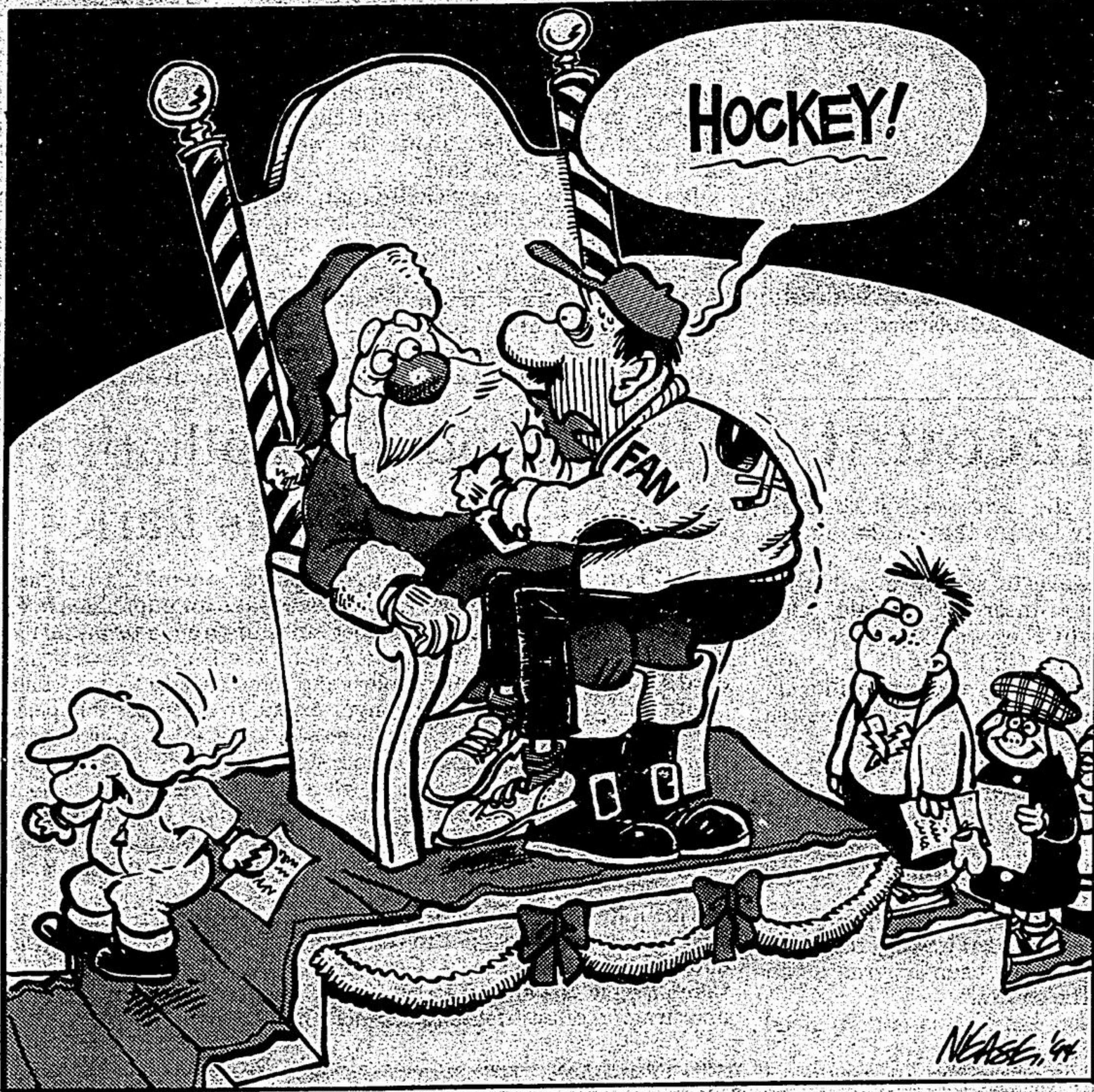
Wrong. A Moscow entrepreneur by the name of Alexander Nefyodov has taken over Schisselburg and turned it into a prison hotel.

**MARKHAM ECONOMIST AND SUN STOUFFVILLE TRIBUNE UXBRIDGE TRIBUNE**  
 Weekender edition  
 A Metroland Community Newspaper  
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The Markham Economist and Sun, Stouffville Tribune and Uxbridge Tribune, published every Wednesday and Saturday, is one of the Metroland Printing, Publishing and Distributing group of suburban newspapers which includes: Ajax Pickering News Advertiser, Barrie Advance, Brampton Guardian, Burlington Post, Collingwood Connection, Etobicoke Guardian, The Liberal, Georgetown Independent/Action Free Press, Kingston This Week, Lindsay This Week, Milton Canadian Champion, Mississauga News, North York Mirror, Oakville Beaver, Orillia Today, Oshawa Whisby This Week, Peterborough This Week, Scarborough Mirror, The Era Banner.

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### Basic Black

Arthur Black

You read right. Russians can now sign up to spend a week at Schisselburg as a prisoner.

Mind you, they must be wealthy Russians. The price tag for a week in a cell is \$550. For that "clients" receive an iron bed which folds out from the wall, plus a wooden table and bench.

Also a lightbulb that never goes out and yes, you are locked in your cell.

It's not all grim. The \$550 also covers visits from a "prison psychologist" who will help the inmates evaluate and assess their mental conditions.

It's too early to say whether Comrade Nefyodov's speculative gamble will pay off or not, but if it does, we shouldn't be surprised.

We live, as I said, in weird times.

We live in a time when Hollywood is busy shooting a movie about the trial of O.J. Simpson - while the trial of O.J. Simpson is still going on.

We live in a time when a man who would be King of the British Empire reveals he'd rather be a tampon.

We live in a time - I'm not making this up, either - when a Yuppie clothier by the name of J. Crewe can advertise without a hint of a smirk, "pre-ripped jeans"

The J. Crewe fall catalogue advises all would-be jeans buyers that "we have now allowed for more impatient sorts with our 'new' slashed jean that looks 10 year sold on day one."

And hey - they only charge an extra six bucks for ripping those jeans for you - 10 bucks if you want both knees out.

My course is clear. I'm going to sell off all my crummy old jeans on the black market and use the money for a down payment on a cell in Schisselburg.

I could use a week to get away from it all.

## ADAM

by Brian Basset

