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Sales Barn Fire

Merchants lose everything in suspicious blaze

By **JOAN RANSBERRY**
Staff Reporter

Inspectors from the Ontario Fire Marshals office returned to Stouffville Monday morning to continue to sift through the remains of a fire-gutted building.

Meanwhile, local business owners are taking stock of their loss.

The \$240,000 blaze completely destroyed three businesses each situated in one building, located at the Stouffville Sales Barns on the 10th Line.

No one was in the building at the time of the 3 a.m. Friday blaze. Also, none of the 15 firefighters attending the nine-hour fire was injured.

The building and all the contents of Tommy's Dollar Barn, Frank Battaglia's Shoes and Country Market Clearance Centre are gone.

For Ray Thirgood, owner of the market, it was a \$50,000 personal loss.

"It was just too hot. Nothing survived," Thirgood told *The Tribune*.

It was also a complete loss for Tom Ashby, owner of the Dollar store, confirmed Rob Shannon, manager of the sales barns.

He had no content insurance," said Shannon. "Everything is gone."

Thirgood operated Country Market Clearance for 10

years. He carried no content insurance on the business.

"The (insurance premium) rates were too high. The building was too old to cover it," Thirgood said. "I'm trying not to be too upset."

Battaglia has some insurance but certainly not enough to cover the entire loss, said Shannon.

While arson is suspected in the middle-of-the-night blaze, a final report from the provincial fire investigators is not expected for at least "a month and possibly two months," said Whitchurch-Stouffville fire chief Bill Brown.

The entire investigation has been handed over to the Fire Marshal's office, confirmed the fire chief.

"It's one thing to know it was set. It's another thing to know who set it," said Brown.

Arson was, however, suspected from the outset, said Brown.

It was a stubborn blaze. "It was very windy," said Brown.

Firefighters were worried the blaze would spread to the new multi-million dollar building.

Using the town's new aerial ladder, firefighters hosed down the main structure to keep it from catching. "They're lucky that it didn't go too," said Brown.

Business owners aren't the only ones affected by the fire. Staff of the burned out retail outlets are now wondering about their future.

Thirgood employed a manager and three part-time employees at his store. The part-time help are students, he said.

While nothing is definite, Thirgood said he will try to place these workers at Amegos Hardware, located at the sales barn. Thirgood also owns Amegos.

"I'll try to place them," he said.

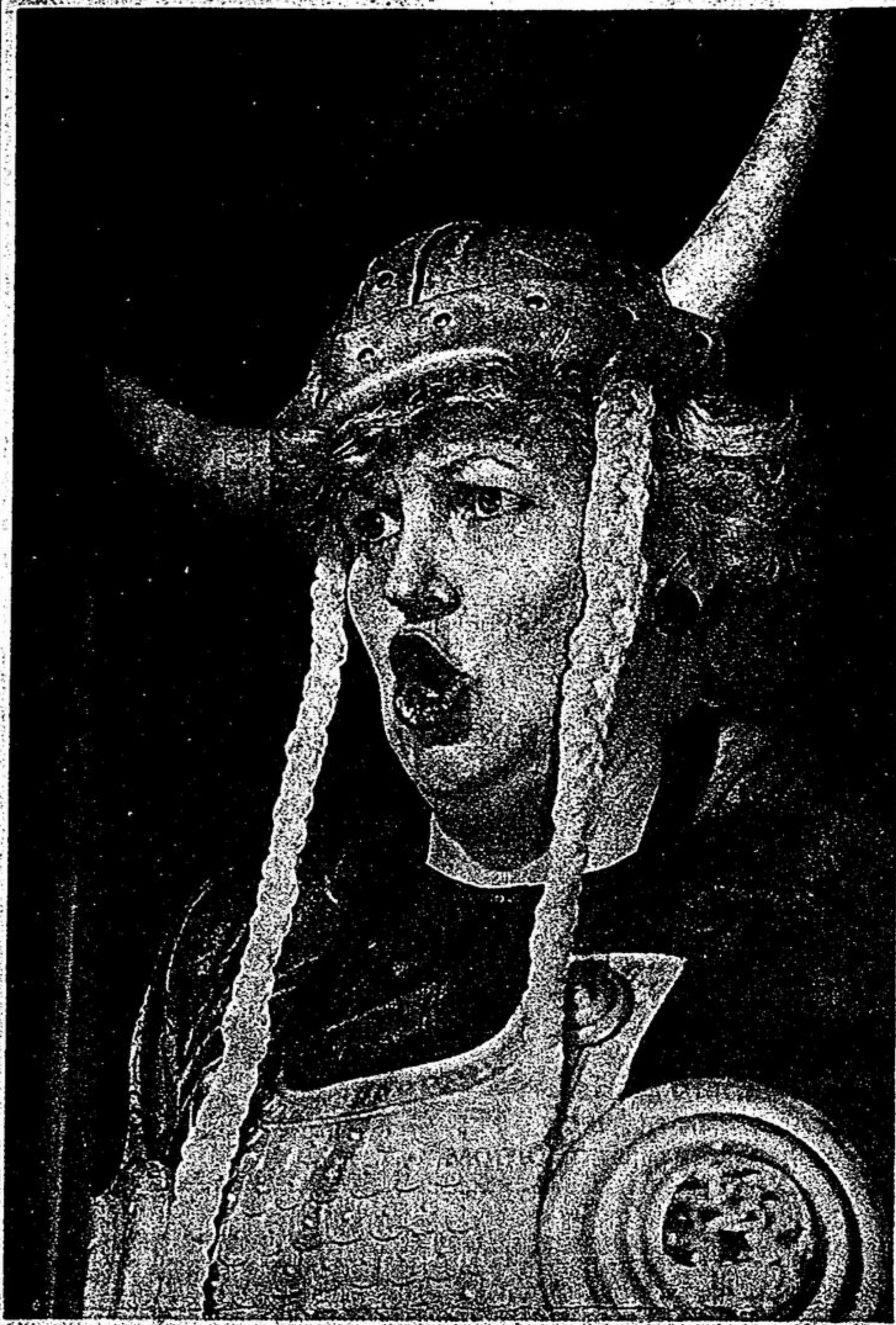
Although fire struck 24 hours before the grand opening of this year's Stouffville Country Market, officials took a The-Show-Must-Go-On approach.

The fire scene was roped off and the grand opening was held on schedule on Saturday.

"The fire was a terrible thing. It was a tough couple of days for us, especially Friday. But, we opened," said Shannon.

Shannon said he expects the Ontario Fire Marshal's office and the insurance company "to release" the burned building from their jurisdictions by mid-week.

"We hope to be able to demolish it and clean up the scene sometime before the end of the week," said Shannon.



Music Mania opens tomorrow

Doris Harvey puts her all into an operatic Viking aria during the skit, Song Foolery, at rehearsals for Music Mania on the weekend. The 35th annual version of the popular show opens Thursday for a three-day run at Stouffville District Secondary School.

Photo: SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Budget

Push for pool expected as town council meets

By **JOAN RANSBERRY**
Staff Reporter

A call for a green light for an indoor swimming pool and a red light for a new civic centre was expected to be made at Tuesday night's town council meeting.

Sue Sherban, advocate for the pool project, plans to remind local government that interest in an indoor swimming pool continues to grow in Stouffville.

Meanwhile, a councillor is expected to ask council to cancel a plan to authorize

the design plans for a new civic centre.

Total cost of a new centre has been estimated at \$3.9 million.

A survey carried out recently shows 58 per cent of the residents of Stouffville cited a pool as the

most wanted recreational facility.

"We have spent the last 10 years paying off the existing arena and have invested a lot of time and money," Sherban told *The Tribune*.

"It is time we start to support the rest of our recreational needs for the prenatal, infant, senior citizen, handicapped and youth," she added.

While Whitchurch-Stouffville Council is expected to ratify its operating budget and a one-year capital budget tonight, the town's full five-year capital forecast has been put on hold.

Instead, council will hold a two-day strategy session in mid-May to deal with a proposed \$22-million wish list.

While the list does not, at this time, include a swimming pool or a second ice pad, there's a great deal of community pressure to build both facilities now.

Advocates for a second ice pad have long reminded council that the town has outgrown the existing arena. There are now 1,300 ice users in town.

A \$1-million ice pad is proposed. Meanwhile, the capital cost of a pool is between \$1.9 and \$3.8 million.

"But remember, no one from this pool delegation has

(Please see page 3)

Cause of weekend house fire under investigation

Investigators with the Ontario Fire Marshals office have been called in to sift through the remains of a house following a weekend fire.

Whitchurch-Stouffville fire chief Bill Brown said fire completely destroyed the two-story unoccupied house located at Kennedy Rd. and St. John's Rd. While the local fire department responded to the blaze as soon as it was reported, it was fully engulfed by the time firefighters arrived. The Ontario Fire Marshals office are looking for a cause for the fire in connection with the blaze. It's expected to be 24 hours.

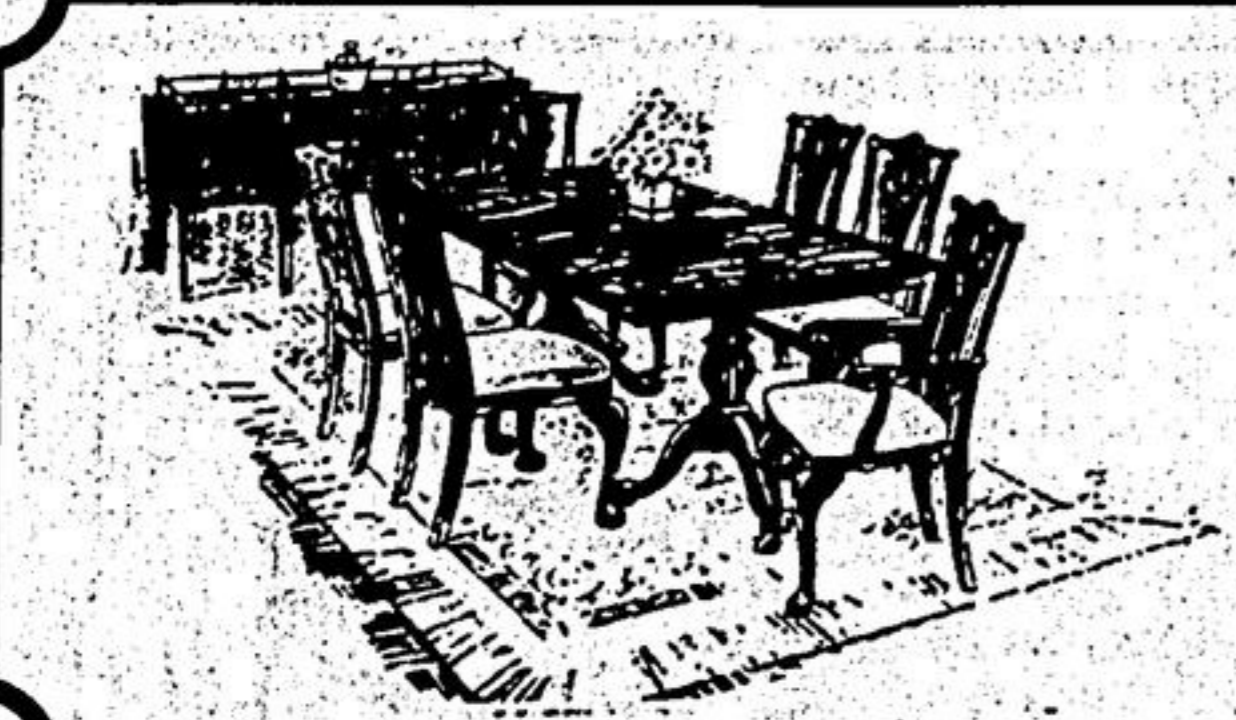
Memorable 50th anniversary



Burt and Helen Palsley, photo above, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in style with a ride through Stouffville in a horse-drawn carriage. Photo at right, just like any other vehicle on Main Street, the carriage was subjected to the Stouffville firefighters voluntary toll to raise funds for charities. Here, firefighter Pete Reesor offers congratulations for the couple while collecting the toll from driver Murray Grove.



Photo: SJOERD WITTEVEEN



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