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Small parties provide spice to political life

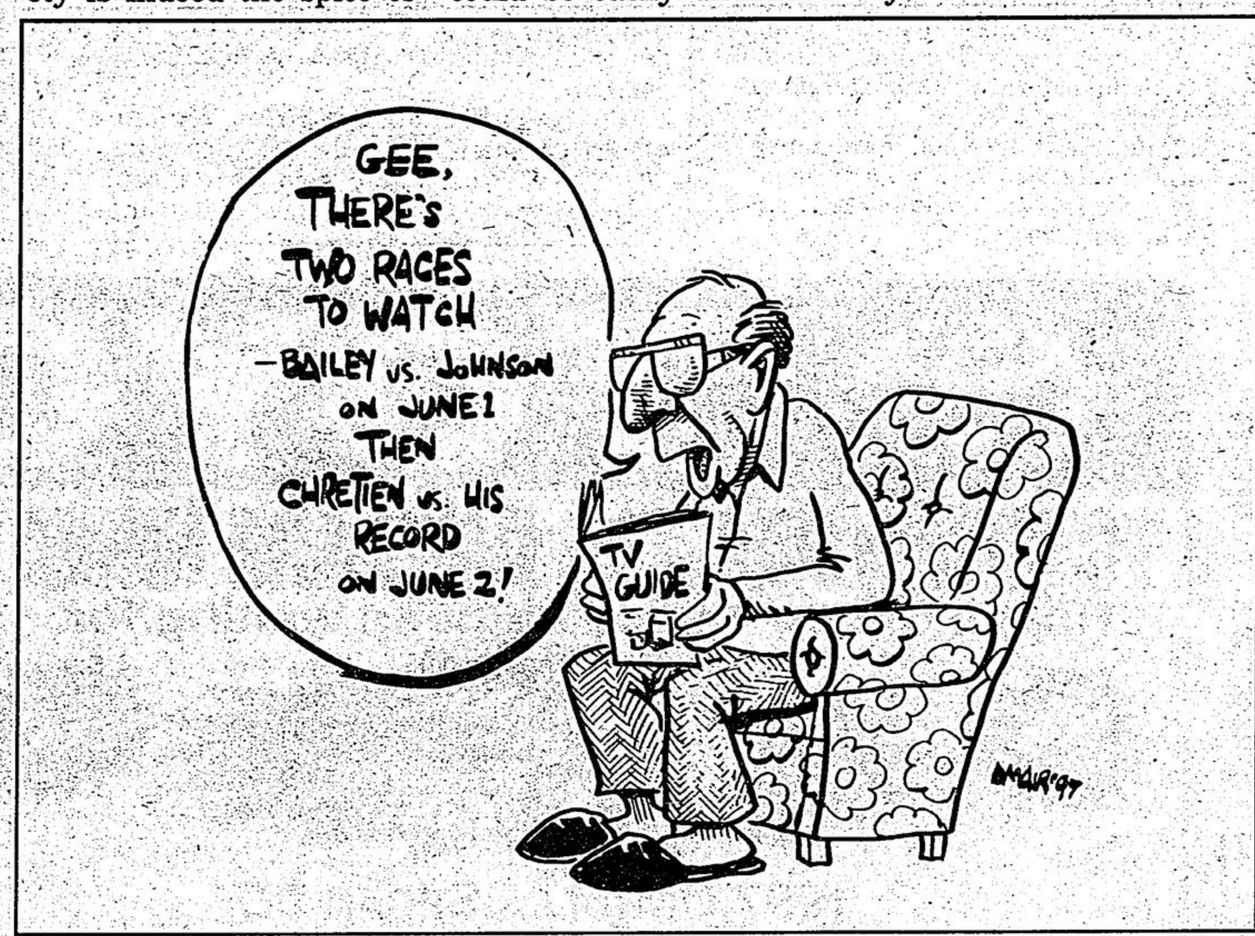
There's an election in the air - you can almost taste it.

This weekend, we are supposed to find out the date we go to the polls. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien has alluded to June 2, and as unlikely a source as his wife Aline have confirmed the date. The various political parties have been scrambling for weeks to get the candidates into place in time for the rush from the political gate once the writ has been handed down. For a party with two sitting members, you have to credit the Conservatives with getting off the mark quickly. The Liberals, as well, seem to have the process down cold. The other main parties, Reform and NDP have been slower to gather the troops in this area.

Something is curiously missing from all the pre-election call hustle and bustle. Where are the other parties? Where are the Natural Law, Green and National parties?

By this point in the last federal campaign, newsrooms and water coolers across the country were abuzz with the rising tide of the small party. Whether the Liberal juggernaut that swept the country blew them all into oblivion will be seen shortly. If they have been obliterated, it is unfortunate, because variety is indeed the spice of election life. The so-called "fringe" parties provide lively debate and bring to the fore many issues that could be easily dismissed by the major parties.

We urge people from all political stripes to get involved in their democracy.



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Strength found in numbers when there's a problem

OFF THE RECORD

joan ransberry

It can happen anywhere and it does.

While strip plazas are convenient, they can attract special problems. Apparently, incidents at the the Success Square Plaza in Stouffville are making life difficult for some. It must be noted: others are not bothered.

Last week, some plaza residents and business operators formed a citizens' group. The goal is to improve the quality of life at the plaza.

I commend the group. Instead of just complaining and running the risk of having a ghetto-type environment set in, some are working towards finding solutions. These people hope to work with management to nip the problem in the bud. The group is wise – strength in numbers usually works.

I was told point blank that acts of vandalism, excessive noise, garbage, drugs and, on occasion, gang fights are making life unpleasant for some of the tenants of the 17 apartments.

It must be noted: Plaza resident Tanya Arrowsmith is not a member of the citizens' group. In a letter to the editor, Arrowsmith stated that litter is only a minor problem; teens hang out many places and when you live near a bar, you'll hear music.

I'll note: This wasn't the first time trouble linked to this plaza was brought to my attention. A while ago, a story carrying my byline was published in *The Tribune*. The story outlined details of a sickening act of violence.

Police reported that after spending time at the bar, a man was found unconscious in the parking lot. He'd been beaten with a baseball bat. An arrest was made; a young man had his day in court and an old reporter was told to be careful.

While I appreciate the concern for my personal safety, I don't let fear dictate how I do my job. My need for a pay cheque coupled with the public's right to know are far more important than fear. Also, I'll note: Punks and bullies in Stouffville are no different than the punks and bullies in other places. Stupid is stupid regardless of where it lives. Of course, the trouble being reported from Success Square Plaza is not unique. It can and does happen anywhere. I expect it's brought on by greed, neglect, a lack of respect for others and just plan ignorance.

Since town officials and government gave the green light to strip plazas, the town carries responsibility. Whitchurch-Stouffville has a noise as well as a property standards bylaw, covering such things as litter.

This group can appeal to the town's bylaw enforcement office for help. Meanwhile, vandalism, fights and certain noise fall under the umbrella of the York Regional Police.

In the past few weeks, vandalism has left its mark at this plaza. A window in the laundromat was smashed. A few days ago, a plaza resident had to write off her car after vandals laced its hood with fertilizer.

Let's hope all parties involved work together. Residents everywhere deserve a clean and peaceful place to live.

Foiled again in feline scavenger hunt

KATE'S CORNER

kate gilderdale

Poc and Spasm - the cats that keep on giving.

When we made the decision to render our monstrous moggies impotent, we naively assumed that, as gender-free felines, they would automatically become sweeter, calmer and less obnoxious. As I type this line, however, Spasm is sharpening his claws on my leg whilst Poc is creating cat carvings on our priceless antique chest of drawers.

In other words, I made a grave miscalculation. Nevertheless, I cling to the notion that cats are smarter, cuter and more lovable than dogs. Let no one tell you, for instance, that only dogs fetch. Today Spasm, whose mental dexterity makes Homer Simpson look like Einstein, brought me a little gift which he dropped fetchingly at my feet.

A mangled stalk met my jaundiced eye. Since a visitor had kindly brought me a nice bunch of carnations the previous evening, I figured that the proffered trophy must have fallen off the counter when I was trimming the flowers. I praised my cerebrally challenged kitty warmly then gently removed the chewed remains of his present while his minute attention span was elsewhere engaged.

Later in the afternoon, I surveyed the dining room and was greeted with a sad sight - a bunch of stalks, interspersed with the odd semi-decapitated flower, which was all that remained of my beautiful bouquet. It was no use admonishing Spasm, who, according to my Guide to Cats and Kittens, would have no idea why I was getting my knickers in a knot unless I pronounced and carried out sentence during the actual commission of the crime.

With great forbearance, I returned to my office and continued to input the Great Canadian Column. Within minutes, Poc appeared in the doorway, a large, foil-wrapped package dangling tantalizingly from his jaws.

Dropping it just centimetres beyond my reach, he gazed at me proudly and waited for my effusive thanks. His donation turned out to be a peanut butter sandwich which had apparently been hijacked from the darkest recesses of my daughter's backpack.

Having no desire to pursue the murky question of its vintage, I smiled through clenched teeth, chucked a newly-minted foil ball up the stairs and waited until Poc was in hot pursuit of this prize before consigning his latest offering to the trash. All over Chateau Gilderdale, 'neath chairs, beds, chests and appliances, lurk several hundred feet of foil, all rolled into little balls for the edification of my animal companions.

It seemed like a good idea at first but now, every time I extract a sheet of foil from the dispenser, eight furry feet thunder across the kitchen floor from nowhere and two pairs of eyes regard me unblinkingly until I construct the latest in the series of this plethora of playthings.

A game of fetch ensues, with both cats vying for possession and one returning triumphant to deposit a soggy, misshapen foil ball at my feet for the next pitch. The chase itself involves crashing head-on into sundry items such as table legs, doors and people who happen to be in the way and may well account for Spasm's severe deficit in the intelligence department.

Anyone want to swap their goldfish for two cats and a year's supply of foil?