

Comment & Opinions

Tuesday, October 14, 1997
Vol. 109, No. 65

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EDITORIAL

Let cooler heads prevail in dispute

Okay, everybody, take a few deep breaths and step back from the brink of conflict.

With the surprise change of education minister last week, Ontario teachers and the Harris government policy makers can take a step back from the looming crisis in our schools.

Instead of planning strike actions which threaten to close classroom doors, confuse students and upset parents, teachers can concentrate on their jobs and allow time for the new education minister, Dave Johnson, to get a handle on the issues.

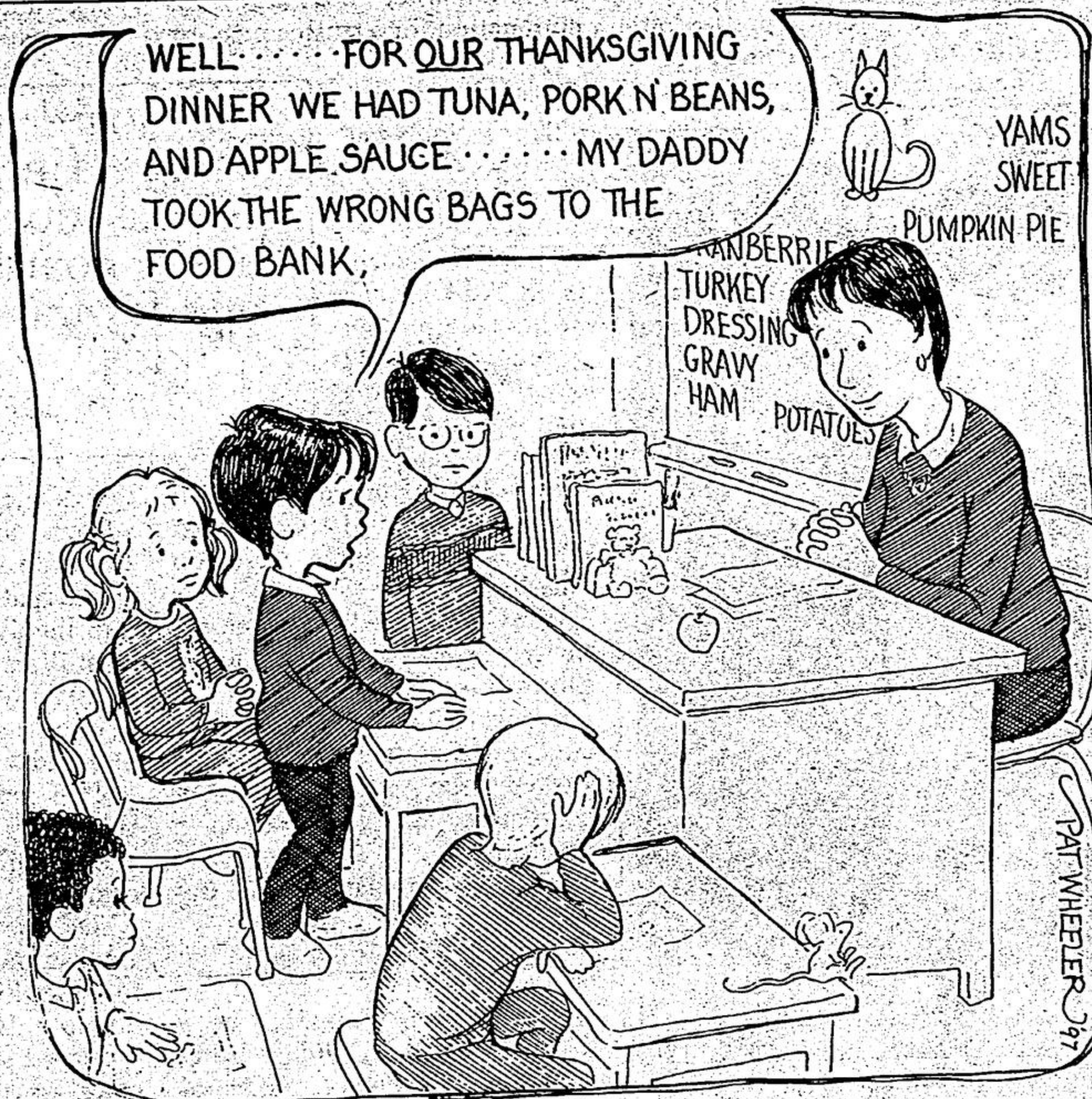
Hopefully, as a post-secondary degree graduate with a reputation for successfully handling explosive labour issues, Johnson will have more credibility with teachers and their union leaders than John Snobelen, a high-school dropout.

It would be naive to assume there's been a change of heart at Queen's Park. Many — if not most — of the education reforms in Bill 160 will be implemented, even with a new man holding the portfolio. Teachers' real-world concerns about the bill's effects on their classrooms and students aren't likely to change, either.

Teachers hope the change of ministers is a sign the government wishes to avoid an ugly confrontation which would hurt the students — the very people both sides say they are trying to protect.

Everyone agrees on two things: change is difficult and changes are needed to ensure Ontario's education system is first class.

If those two mantras are considered by both sides in future discussions, and cooler heads prevail, hopefully the dispute can be resolved. Then schools can return to being the halls of learning not the trenches of warfare.



Level playing fields in many wards

"It ain't over 'til the fat lady sings" is, one of my very favorite sayings.

Waiting 'til the big gal belts out a song applies to much in life including municipal elections. Remember: Anything can happen. Sometimes we get lucky and it does. In this business, waiting is not done. Considering this, I took a hard look at the candidates seeking office in both Whitchurch-Stouffville and Uxbridge. One thing is absolute: the candidates are worth a trip to the polls on November 10.

I have little respect for people who don't vote. I can't take them seriously. In fact, I lump the apathetic together with the parasites of our society. They're the first to complain, the last to help and the reality is, they cost us far, far more than they're worth.

Having said that, let's not waste any more time on deadbeats. Instead, let's deal with you: the voter.

The mayor's race in Whitchurch-Stouffville will be hard fought. One thing is certain: Incumbent mayor Wayne Emmerson wants to be re-elected. The man likes the job. Do not, I repeat, do not underestimate mayoralty candidate Mike Watson. His is a serious challenge. Since Emmerson and Watson are both bull dog stubborn, this campaign will be anything but dull!

It's a different story in Uxbridge: Unless incumbent Mayor Gerri Lynn O'Connor does something really stupid, she'll be re-elected in a cake walk. While mayoralty candidate June Davies will try, the voters won't deliver her way.

When it comes to mayors, Uxbridge has been spoiled. Former Uxbridge mayor, the late Gary Herrema was considered by many to be the best mayor in Ontario. His were difficult shoes to fill. But, Bill Ballinger filled them. Ballinger, who's now a Stouffville businessman, was an accomplished mayor and an even better MPP.

I'd feel a wee bit insecure if I had to follow Herrema and Ballinger into any political arena. Such was not the case with O'Connor. From Day 1, O'Connor proved she can do the job. The only criticism



Joan Ransberry

Off the Record

cism I have is: O'Connor needs to smile more often. Before addressing the individual ward races, let's get this straight. An acclamation carries this message, "You're doing a good job. Keep it up." I'd like to congratulate acclaimed Whitchurch-Stouffville Ward 4 Council-

lor Cliff Dunkeld and Uxbridge Ward 1 councillor Bev Northeast and Ward 5 councillor Larry Austin.

At this point, most of the ward races in Whitchurch-Stouffville are too close to call. It's an Even-Steven between Steve Pliakes and Frank Martino in Ward 1, between Helene Johnson and Mark Carroll in Ward 2, between Peter Dobrich and Sophie Angelis in Ward 3 and between incumbent Councillor Mark Kostandoff and Sue Sherban in Ward 6.

While Whitchurch-Stouffville Ward 5, incumbent Judy Scala will be re-elected, she'll have to work for it since challenger

Judy Saabas is a go-getter.

In Uxbridge, the race to watch is in Ward 3. Incumbent Ron Johnson is facing stiff competition from Frank Weinholt and Faith Neumann.

In Uxbridge's Ward 2, keep an eye on Ted Eng. He's giving incumbent councillor Bev Beach a good run. And, when the day is done, Carol Kuula will have good reason to be proud of her showing. It's a level playing field in Uxbridge's Ward 4. Political newcomers Brian Heddle and Suzanne Redford are both keen. This one's too close to call.

Happy campaigning.

And the winner, by a whisker, is ...



Kate's Corner
Kate Gilderdale

If the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, the way to a child's is through his or her animal companion.

This fact was brought painfully to mind when your correspondent was asked to judge the children's pet show at Markham Fair. My experiences in judging baby contests did not prepare me for the excruciatingly-tough task of rating hedgehog over hamster, or measuring the cleverness quotient of a dog who danced and rolled over against that of a cat who snuck a snack from its owner's mouth.

Even apparently straightforward categories such as shortest tail, biggest paw and longest whiskers were fraught with unanticipated pitfalls.

Do you know what happens when you try to measure a dog's tail? The dog tucks said appendage firmly against its body, refusing all attempts to prise it away long enough to accomplish the task at hand.

Then there's the tape measure, with its tiny, perfect figures. A year ago, I could have read it with ease. At the fair, I was obliged to seek out a spot where the light was bright enough for my desperate squinting to reveal the statistics which would make or break a potential

champion. It was not denial or vanity that made me neglect to pack my reading glasses so much as the increasing vagueness which is the lot of the increasingly middle-aged.

The most exciting part of all was trying to determine which cat had the longest whiskers.

As a life-long feline fancier, I had never before noticed that whiskers on individual cats come in an astonishing variety of lengths — some curly, some straight — and cats, as we all know, are not in the business of accommodating humans unless their attentions lead directly to a full stomach.

You may laugh, but just try and cajole a cat intent on burying its head in the sanctuary of a familiar shoulder into letting you 1) find and 2) measure its longest whisker.

All of the above pales into insignificance, however, with my feel-

ings at the beginning of the contest when the announcer declared, 'Here comes the judge' — a singular noun, meaning me.

The buck stopped firmly at my feet and, given the reverence with which owners regard their pets, that was a scary thought. Should I leave the country until whispers of Whiskergate died down? Should I have my calls screened and avoid walking the streets of Stouffville, Uxbridge and Markham?

Happily, the large crowd seemed more intent on enjoying itself than apportioning blame for blows to a beloved pet's self-esteem.

As an avowed animal lover, I would have liked to award all the contestants best in show. Their young handlers also deserved a collective award for sportsmanship and enthusiasm, and for not encouraging Fido to take a chunk out of the judge's leg.

As for the organizers — those volunteers who spend countless hours putting such events together — they have my undying admiration. Now that I've had my one and a half hours of fame in the entertainment tent in front of a capacity crowd, I'm beginning to warm to the subtle joys of obscurity.

STOUFFVILLE TRIBUNE

A Metroland Community Newspaper

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Andrew Mair
Editor-In-Chief
Julie Caspersen
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Pamela Nichols
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about us

News
(905) 640-2100
Retail sales
(905) 640-2100
Classifieds
(905) 640-2874
Distribution
(905) 640-2100
Fax
(905) 640-5477
E-Mail
thetrib@istar.ca
6244 Main St.,
Stouffville, Ont.
L4A 1E2

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