

Community has will to keep gallery alive

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library program for 19 years. While library board chair Jan Williams cited finances as a reason for closure, gallery supporters are insisting that over the history of the gallery, the facility did not

pose a burden on the taxpayers. Rather, the gallery brought a cultural enrichment to the town, stressed gallery supporter Sharon Maude.
Maude said she didn't know if Monday's meeting would "attract

eight or 80 people. It was neither. Well over 100 turned up.
After the audience was given a brief history of the gallery and an update on its recent closure, those attending put their heads together to iron out the first stage of a plan designed to establish an independent gallery. "We'll pull this off," said Maude.

Linda Giles suggested the interest, the passion and the know-how for a gallery to thrive exists in Stouffville. "When there's a will, there's a way," said Giles.

With the full backing of the audience, an agenda was struck. A business plan, including a budget, will be presented to council. As well, a request for a municipal grant will be made. A board will be set up and a town-wide membership drive will be launched.

Latham Gallery may be closed but it's "still very much with us," said Giles. "It's an important asset to this community," said Giles.

When the library board ceased operations of Latham Gallery, it had 213 members. It's estimated that 9,000 visitors passed through

the gallery doors last year.

An independent gallery would cost about \$90,000 a year. The financing could be a cost-sharing endeavour between the province, the town, fundraising, individual donations and membership fees.

An "independent" gallery is what's been needed for a very long time, said Mayor Wayne Emmerson. "I'm pleased to hear that the meeting was so positive," he said.

Municipal funding for the gallery could be a reality within two weeks. Council could agree to the grant on the spot on April 6," said Emmerson.

Those attending the information meeting included Stouffville, and area artists as well as art teachers, art lovers and many concerned citizens.

Jane Warren, art teacher at Stouffville District Secondary School, stressed that the gallery is a cultural facility that doesn't cost the community. "Rather, it brings money into this community," said Warren.

The gallery should be governed by an independent board with an

"independent identity," said Doug Alles. "An agreement with the library could be worked out," he said.

Stephen Sword suggested the group sign a position statement to emphasize the desire to have a local art centre within Stouffville's boundaries.

Artists have a reputation of being passive, said artist Gus Wiesman. "It's time the artists stood up for this facility," he said.

Dr. Ralph Pohlam said the people bent on keeping the gallery need to remain confident that it will work.

While most suggested Latham Gallery remain where it is, other options included locating it in the existing municipal office if this building is turned into a theatre centre.

Maude reminded the audience that attending the April 6 meeting at Latham Hall is critical to the gallery's future. "Come to the council meeting on April 6 at 7 p.m. sharp. Let's show council we're united and intent on keeping our gallery," said Maude.



Sharon Maude, standing, and Linda Giles address the crowd gathered at the Monday evening Latham Gallery meeting. Photo by SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Zero budget depends on provincial figures

JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Reporter

Whitchurch-Stouffville delivering a "zero increase" budget might hinge on Ontario Premier Mike Harris keeping a promise.

While town council is expected to deliver its '98 budget on March 30, property owners will have to wait until late April or May to find out how it impacts on taxes.

"The local mill rate will not be set until late April or May," said Mayor Wayne Emmerson.

The Harris-led provincial government is expected to release the final figures for the cost of transferring responsibility for some services to municipalities. Until this is done, council can't set the mill rate, stressed Emmerson.

Harris did promise a revenue-neutral outcome for Ontario's municipalities.

"Harris promised that the changes will be revenue neutral. I'm holding Harris accountable," said Emmerson.

In January, the town learned that the "revenue-neutral" promise translates into a \$180,000 shortfall in provincial transfer money for Whitchurch-Stouffville. The big catch is, the shortfall figure changes week to week, town treasurer Ed Blackburn reported.

Even if the final figure is in the range of \$200,000, which reflects

two per cent of the budget, the town does have money in reserve, Blackburn pointed out.

Province-wide, Harris is demanding that Ontario's 815 municipalities cut more than half a million dollars from their budgets.

Last year, council's \$13.2-million budget reflected a zero-per cent tax hike for Whitchurch-Stouffville ratepayers. The average homeowner in Whitchurch-

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Stouffville paid about \$25 for the municipal portion of the three-way tax bill.

This year, council is expected to earmark more money for roads than in previous years. Emmerson said \$500,000 is itemized for capital works. This represents a \$170,000 increase for roads over

last year. "In terms of road maintenance, we've been keeping pace," said Emmerson.

The big ticket items on this year's capital budget are the

library expansion. Meanwhile, the proposed indoor swimming pool will likely find its way into the 1999 capital budget, said Emmerson.

Alleged illegal dumping alarms pit neighbours

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shut the operation down a week ago.
The gravel pit has caught the attention of the local MPP, Julia Munro plans to visit the gravel pit next Friday.

Neighbour Dave Fockler has contacted a lawyer about the matter. Fockler wants to know exactly what's been dumped so close to his home.

Gravel operations at this pit ceased in 1984. At that time, the owner was granted a licence by the Ministry of Natural Resources to rehabilitate the site. However, in the past year it has been used as a dumping site, taking such materials as road and construction fill and demolition material.

Sabiston used it for different purposes, reported Kathy Douglas of the MNR. Sabiston did, however, voluntarily surrender his pit licence to the Ministry of the Natural Resources.

A clean-up plan is, hopefully, being ironed out now, said Don Maitland of the Ministry of the Environment.

Susane Deeder of the MOE said the illegally dumped material will be hauled away by a "certified hauler" and placed in a ministry approved land fill site.



STICKY BUSINESS: Hal Horton spends time with visitors Ester Doucette and David Crosby at Horton's Tree Farm where the sap is running.

Photo by LORI EMMERSON

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