

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
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EDITORIAL

Health dollars aren't arriving quickly enough

We welcome more than 7,000 new residents to York Region each year — babies who arrive at York Region's three hospitals. It's an impressive statistic, a celebratory number. And there are no people more delighted to assist a baby's transition from womb to world than the obstetrical teams at York Region's hospitals, despite the fearsome obstacles they encounter. Obstetrical staff members, along with their counterparts in other hospital departments and health-care facilities, are faced with increased demand and reduced or restructured resources with which to meet that demand.

The province's Health Restructuring Commission appeared to recognize that demand created by growth and recommended all three hospitals — York County in Newmarket, York Central in Richmond Hill and Markham Stouffville in Markham — receive money to expand obstetrical services.

And we applaud that recommendation. But we also voice the concerns of health-care providers who say the funds aren't arriving quickly enough for them to be effective practitioners for their patients.

Consider this: • Obstetrician Cindy Nicholas sees 60 pregnant women a day in her Richmond Hill practice and serves one shift in York Central's delivery room — a shift that can last 12 to 18 hours. On the day we shared with her, she started at 7 a.m. and wrapped up at 10:30 a.m. the next day. She says, despite the "fabulous" nurses, the strain of fewer staff members available around the clock is starting to show.

• Markham Stouffville Hospital has been affected dramatically by community growth, roughly 5,000 new residents a year in each of the past five years. Obstetrics chief Dr. Robert Gall is concerned about what lies ahead, relating that on one busy May morning, he saw 35 pregnant women.

"It's frightening us a little as to what will come in the next few years," he said. "Our big concern is how do we house these people? I hope I'm not the physician on call who meets the lady from Church Street and has to tell her we don't have a bed and then have to send her to Centenary (hospital in Scarborough)."

• York County obstetrical staff are anxiously awaiting the opening of the hospital's new obstetrical unit, retiring the old delivery rooms in the 1945 section of the hospital. With 180 to 200 births each month and only six birthing rooms, the hospital's facilities often reach capacity and sometimes fail to meet the needs of mothers and babies. And growth of the communities York County serves is estimated to be 36.6 per cent between 1991 and 2001, and another 22.6 per cent to 2011.

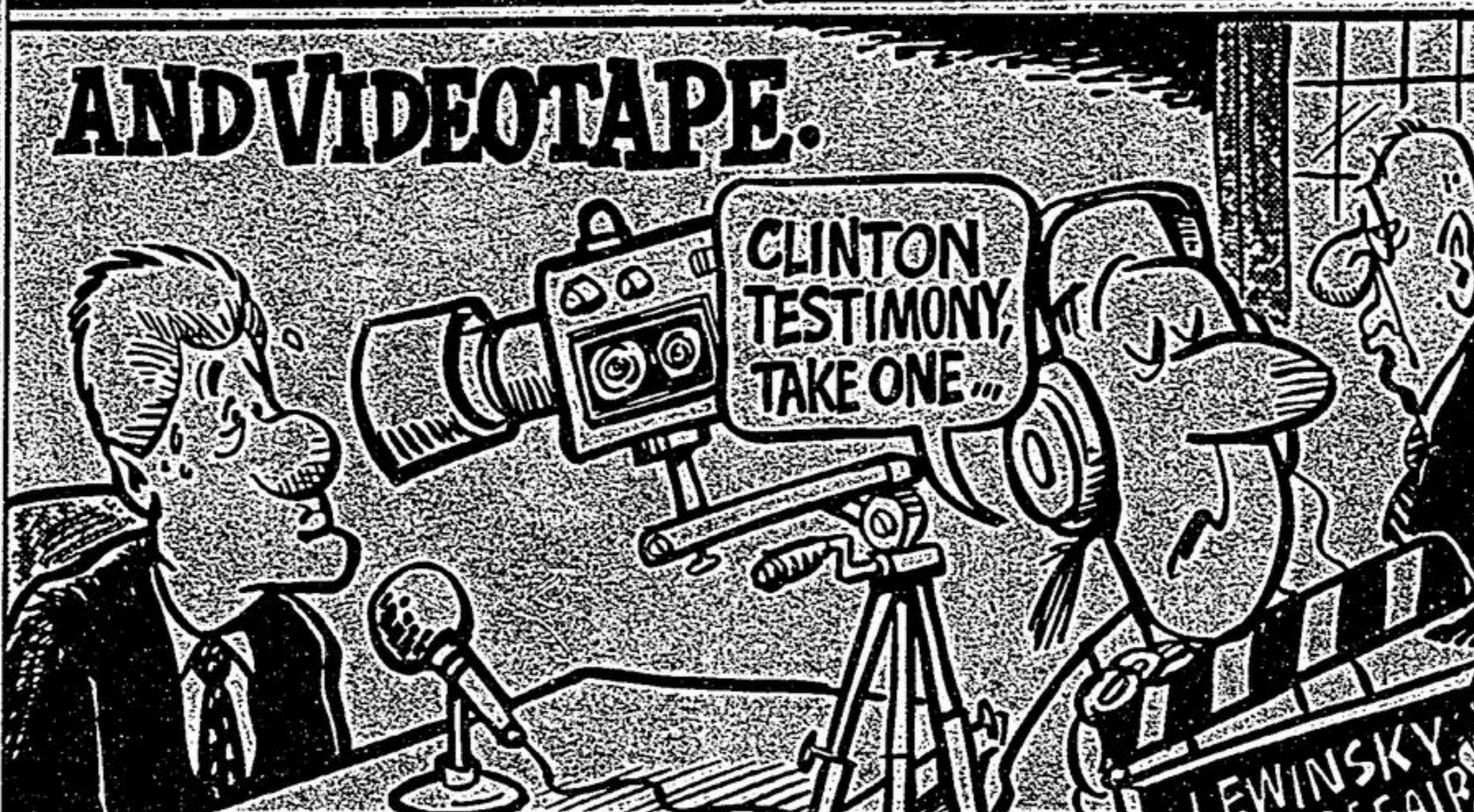
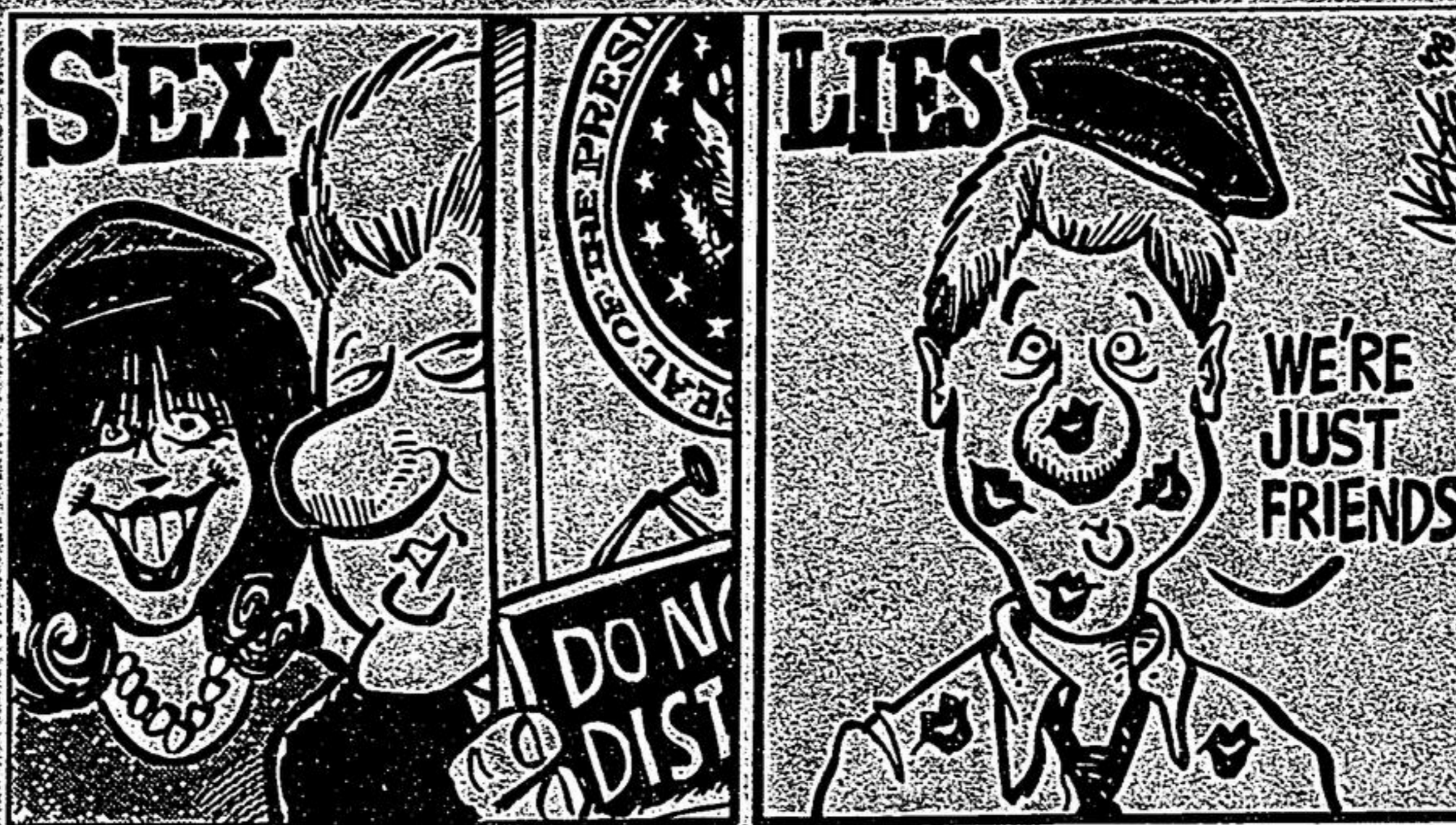
How can this hospital continue to provide quality service if it is struggling to meet demand caused by growth?

So, what's the bottom line? As citizens, we expect high-quality care from the hospitals in our community, but we must also take some responsibility for ensuring our expectations are met by the province.

That means we must continue our best lobbying efforts, demand quality care, show our support for our local health-care providers and let our representatives at Queen's Park know, in no uncertain terms, that quality health-care is not something we're willing to sacrifice.

It's a privilege we must strive to preserve in our society and we must support our health-care providers as they attempt to do their jobs against incredible challenges each day.

OPINION



Doug Devine

Police force still faces stormy ride

Julian Fantino said all the right things at his swearing-in ceremony as York Region's new police chief. York residents can only hope he didn't really mean it.

Describing himself as a new leader with a new vision, Fantino said he doesn't intend to dwell on the past.

"We can only learn from history," he said. "We can study it and relate to it but there is no point to talk about it."

And he said low morale shouldn't continue to be a problem among front-line officers since they are just as eager as he to put the past scandals behind them and move forward.

On the surface, Fantino is correct on both counts. But any suggestion that his arrival will, in itself, turn York's beleaguered force around is both naive and dangerous.

There remains a wide and stormy sea to cross before York will have a police force befitting its position as the seventh-largest and fastest-growing in the country.

Yes, the new chief will help, especially in terms of morale.

But to pin all, or even the lion's share, of the force's woes on Bryan Cousineau is about as unfair as the ridiculous slap on the wrist he received last week from the courts.

As a provincial audit made clear two years ago, a decade of massive growth combined with chronic underfunding has left York with a force that is merely "adequate" — which is bureaucratic language for "in big trouble."

The problems highlighted by the audit, along with Cousineau's indiscretions, must not only be talked about, they must be thoroughly examined and resolved before the force can even think about setting sail on the future.

Over the past several years, there have been several well-publicized examples of how close this rudderless ship has come to crashing and burning.

Luckily, the new skipper can rely on a loyal and dedicated crew to help him.

But dedication and loyalty can only take the force so far without adequate and sustained funding.

And it's on that front that Fantino will face his Waterloo, since he will have to deal with many of the same politicians who conspired with Cousineau to drive the force into the ground.

Some of the force's shortcomings are already being addressed, but it will continue to need more funding, more manpower, better equipment and better training for several years to come.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Show me the music

Isn't it ironic... Maybe I am from a different generation, but doesn't a name like 'Music Town' tell someone that perhaps this is a town where there might be a music store, or somewhere to purchase music or musical instruments, hear music in a park or simply buy a top-10 CD? Where is the music?

I like 'Country Close to the City'

L. CLIFF
STOUFFVILLE

Reader concerned about political lack of concern

Previously, I wrote an open letter to Mayor Wayne Emmerson about stopping development in Stouffville and the surrounding region, which was published in The Tribune.

Since that time, some informative background articles and several related thoughtful letters to the editor have been published.

When I wrote to Emmerson, from whom I still have not received a response, I also wrote to Premier Mike Harris, from whom I have received a response, which is printed below.

Dear Mr. Priebe:
I have received your letter regarding a future development in Whitchurch-Stouffville and the surrounding region.

The local municipal council has the legislative authority to make decisions

which it considers to be in the best interests of the municipality. The Planning Act gives local council the authority to adopt the municipality's official plan and zoning bylaws. You may wish to bring your concerns to the attention of the planning department of your municipality.

Thanks for bringing your concerns to my attention.

Michael D. Harris, MPP

Anyone who is concerned about the current development of Stouffville and the surrounding region will find the premier's response most unsatisfactory.

The premier, for example, does not mention either the proposed 407 extension or the proposed Pickering airport, both of which clearly are within his jurisdiction.

Rather, his letter implies that this kind of issue is not of his concern.

I am disturbed by our premier's and our mayor's lack of concern and lack of response.

For this reason, I would like to organize an informal meeting of concerned citizens.

I invite anyone who feels supportive of this cause to meet at Kinsmen Park (Rupert Avenue and West Lawn Crescent behind the A&P) on Saturday, Aug. 29 at 10 a.m.

Anyone who wishes to contact me can reach me by e-mail at jpriebe@sympatico.ca or call at 640-8294.

JIM W. PRIEBE
STOUFFVILLE

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