

# Appeal deadline Monday

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ities in York have issued their tax bill. And now we can get ready for (more) calls from Whitchurch-Stouffville," Wood said.

He added when it comes to property taxes, the rule of thumb is this:

"You can challenge your assessment notice. You cannot challenge your tax bill."

In March, Whitchurch-Stouffville residents attended CVA information sessions at local community centres. There, staff at the York Region Assessment Office explained the CVA format and how to appeal.

During these sessions, the most often asked question was, "How will this affect my taxes?"

But the question couldn't be answered at the time, Wood said, since the assessment office deals with assessment only.

The tax rate is set by the municipal government based on that assessment.

Earlier, Whitchurch-Stouffville treasurer Ed Blackburn advised residents to take a hard look at the assessment notices and to read the included information. By doing a bit of research, some people may find out they have grounds for an appeal, said Blackburn.

One way to question the notice is to find

out what a comparable property has been assessed at, advised Blackburn. Another way is to ask local real estate agents to give an estimate on current values in the area. In Stouffville, the average assessment is estimated at \$235,000.

About 8,000 Whitchurch-Stouffville property and business owners are days away from getting theirs.

"Any time there's a change (in the assessment system), people get up in arms," said Woods. "There's a lot of questions and inquiries."

In Whitchurch-Stouffville, however, tax collector Ruth Armstrong is not expecting any confusion. The tax bill is straight forward and includes all necessary information, said Armstrong.

While she and staff members are stuffing the tax bill into envelopes in readiness for mailing, they're taking phone calls from people concerned about their property assessment.

"All we (can) do is refer them to the assessment office," said Armstrong.

If you want to appeal your assessment, the only way is to put it in writing and send it to the Province of Ontario Assessment Review Board, 121 Bloor St. E., 13th Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M4W 3M5; fax, (416) 314-3717; call, or call toll free at 1-800-263-3237.

# All parties want unified centre

FROM PAGE 1

nical study. The federal government is also contributing \$50,000 to the project.

Fire chiefs met with some of the consultants planning to bid on the project yesterday. The winner will look at requirements for equipment, labor and location, including investigating whether space beside Newmarket's new fire station, at Eagle and McCaffrey streets could house the new centre.

A report, which will also look at folding in ambulance dispatch, is expected by the end of the year.

However, Newmarket Mayor Tom Taylor pointed out different political agendas have delayed a regional fire department for years.

While there has been general consensus for the need for the centralized dispatch centre, Taylor wants clearer confirmation of support before spending the money.

"I'm totally in favor of the project without reservation. (But) I have concerns we go through this process and then we don't have the approval of the municipalities," he said.

"I think we should have some sort of concurrence that, if we go through with this study, it will be implemented. Because if we don't have that concurrence, why go ahead with it?"

But regional chairperson Bill Fisch said all the players seem to be in favour of a joint dispatch centre.

"It's been in the fire for a while," he said, adding the centralized dispatch centre is a move towards regionalized fire service. Because the technology in the dispatch centres has reached the end of its lifespan,

Fisch said, it's important to centralize operations now before municipalities buy new computers and radios.

"It (a central dispatch centre) will save millions of dollars," he said.

"It's stating the obvious, it should be done this way because of the overall cost savings."

Fisch also supports a regionalized urban fire department.

"There's no doubt that having one department to serve the whole region is the way to go. I want to see it implemented in from two to four years, maybe five."

On Friday, Fisch appointed a fire services task force that includes Taylor, Aurora Mayor Tim Jones, East Gwillimbury Mayor Jim Morton, Georgina Mayor Rob Grossi, Vaughan Councillor Joyce Frustaglio, Richmond Hill Councillor Janet Mabley and Markham Councillor Frank Scarpitti.

Aurora fire chief Joe Hunwicks, who also supports a regional fire department, is pleased the centralized dispatch centre is finally proceeding.

"This is one issue that has been discussed at length, long before I came here (four years ago)," he said.

"There will definitely be an improvement. I'm absolutely in favour because it will address the shortcomings that are evident in many areas."

Hunwicks said residents aren't being served as well as they should be under four dispatch centres. "No doubt about it, there are challenges among the four (communications) centres. They have difficulty providing service that's needed."

However, he's unsure whether the central facility will lead to a regional fire department.

## POLICE: Operating a car safely is emphasized during driving campaign



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEN

Politician Jim Jones goes over his score with Driver Examiner Mati Holland at the Car Rodeo held at the Markham Civic Centre Saturday.

# Safe driving rodeo puts focus on life, death

BY KATHLEEN GRIFFIN  
STAFF WRITER

It didn't matter if you were a politician, a business person or a media representative — if you hit a pylon or forgot to signal, you lost points.

Saturday's car rodeo celebrating the 1998 Safe and Responsible Driving Campaign offered dignitaries and the general public a chance to test their driving skills and knowledge of the rules of the road.

On a course laid out in the Markham Civic Centre parking lot, participants spent Saturday morning parallel parking, changing lanes, driving backwards through a pylon path and coming to a complete — not a rolling — stop.

"Anyone will tell you, especially police officers, how terrible it is to attend an accident, especially when there are children involved, when it could have been prevented by safe driving skills," said former Metro Toronto Police Chief Bill McCormack, honorary

chairperson of this year's campaign.

More than 30 residents signed up for the public portion of the event.

York Regional Police Const. Ben Eng, the event's co-ordinator, urged all drivers to refresh their knowledge and skills at least once a year.

"You'll be amazed at how much you've forgotten," he said.

"As a result of aggressive driving, excessive speed, impaired driving and road rage, too many people are killed or injured," Jolliffe told the crowd.

"People still continue to behave as if driving is a right, not a privilege."

According to Ministry of Transportation statistics, someone dies on Ontario roads every nine hours while someone is injured in an accident every six minutes.

Last year across Ontario, 400,000 vehicles were involved in 200,000 collisions that cost about \$9 billion.

In York Region, 35 acci-

dents killed 30 people in 1997.

To date this year, 18 people have died on York roads, fatalities that don't include crashes on provincial highways, which are investigated by the Ontario Provincial Police.

"This is a worthwhile, meaningful event," Jolliffe said. "We all must take steps to eradicate this problem and create a benchmark of excellence."

General Motors of Canada supplied three new Grand Ams for the participants. The event was organized by the Canadian Chinese Insurance Professionals Association and the Centre for Information and Community Services.

"It was an excellent way to promote awareness," said Jones. "You start to see obvious mistakes you don't even think about. If you're alerted, you can pay more attention, which will make our roads safer for everyone. It's a great initiative on the part of the Chinese community."

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