

JUSTICE: Family law cases will be dealt with more quickly

Family courts 'clogged'

BY DAWN LIERSCH
STAFF WRITER

York Region is among 12 Ontario areas approved for a new family court system intended to clear the backlogs in civil and criminal courts.

Attorney General Charles Harnick announced Friday the Eagle Street courthouse in Newmarket will expand in the spring to include a unified family court.



FRANK KLEES

Forty per cent of residents will enjoy improved service

"This means cases can be dealt with much more quickly. It's not acceptable that people who need these services should have to wait six, seven or eight weeks just to receive a motion," Harnick said.

Currently, family law cases are heard in general and provincial division courts — and many families have to deal with both.

But, since the federal government

will appoint judges with specialized expertise to the new family courts, judges in the general and provincial divisions will be free to handle other cases.

In York Region, local lawyers report the "motions" court is so badly clogged that 38 to 40 matters may be heard by one judge, compared to about five or six cases in a similar Toronto court.

In addition, the region has a growing number of divorce and family custody cases.

"This offers a more timely and more hands-on response to those very emotional, very critical needs that arise when there are crises with families," said Chief Justice Patrick LeSage.

"It will result in somewhat less conflict in what is already a traumatic situation."

Unified Family Court was a pilot project in Hamilton about 20 years ago. It then expanded to London, Barrie, Kingston and Napanee in 1985.

York Mackenzie MPP Frank Klees said approval for the new communities means 40 per cent of Ontario's residents will have access to improved service.

Ottawa, Durham Region, Peterborough, Cobourg, Lindsay, Bracebridge, Cornwall, Brockville, Perth, L'Orignal and St. Catharines will also receive the new courts.

Although Harnick said he wants the new courts to be available province-wide, the federal government hasn't appointed enough judges.

"We're ready to commit the resources for the rest of the province if the federal government will provide the judges," he said. "It is not right to have two systems. It leads to uneven services."

Unified Family Court also provides access to mediation as an alternative to formal court proceedings.

Information sessions about other options to resolve disputes and the effects of separation are also geared to lessen the emotional toll on children.

'It will result in somewhat less conflict in what is already a traumatic situation'

• Chief Justice Patrick LeSage



Joan Ransberry

It'll be a Merry first Christmas on the lake

Friday will be a day of firsts. It'll be the first time in my entire life that I won't wake up on Christmas morning in Durham Region.

As of October, I became a first-time homeowner. The purchase means this will be my first Christmas living in Musselman's Lake.

Even my Christmas tree is a first. It's the first year I have not had a real tree. As an adult, my tree of choice has been a spruce.

Spruce trees were scarce on our farm. As a child, we'd trek to the woods, chop down a cedar, place it on the toboggan and drag it home. More often than not, I'd be in charge of the axe. More often than not, I'd forget it.

"Go get the axe where you left it and then you can get warm," was the parent's order. Unlike 99.9 per cent of Canadian children, I hated getting the Christmas tree.

When the artificial trees hit the market in the late 60s, I was appalled. Not only did the manmade trees look fake, they were tacky. I vowed artificial trees would have to come a long way before one would grace my home. As you well know artificial trees did come a long way. And, yes, they took a long time.

Last year on Dec. 26, I went to Cullen Garden's Boxing Day sale. (This too was a first). There, in the middle of the store, was a grand looking Christmas tree.

I was shocked to discover that this beautiful tree was artificial. Marked at 50 per cent off the list price, I bought it. Today, it is nestled in a corner in the livingroom of my new house. Forgive my vanity, but I'm proud to own one of the best looking trees around.

In case you haven't guessed, I'm proud to live in Musselman's Lake. The hamlet has charm. Good neighbouring is easy. For the most part, everyone's decent and friendly. Even the dogs are polite.

I have a wonderful view of the lake from my deck. In the past few months, I've grown quite fond of the lake. In fact, I worry about it.

Musselman's Lake could be a jewel. Hopefully, residents and the Friends of Musselman's Lake will continue to monitor the lake.

The pollution issue needs to be brought to the attention of the right people. Local MPP Julia Munro has written to the Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Ministry of the Environment concerning the lake.

Let's hope she comes back with good news. As well, our local government has a responsibility to make sure bodies of waters, including Musselman's Lake, are healthy.

Sometime in '99, the Ministry of Environment will release results of water tests carried out on Musselman's Lake this past summer.

If the water tests indicate that pollution is, indeed, a threatening issue then let's fix it. We need to work in partnership with the town and the province.

Perhaps, we could declare a healthy Musselman's Lake as one of the town's millennium projects.

On Friday when I wake in my little house, I'll look out and wish the lake a very Merry Christmas.

PS.

Merry Christmas from my house to yours.

Quebec visitor's suitcases stolen

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
STAFF WRITER

A thief stole a visitor's suitcases containing the Christmas gifts for his family, clothes, a camera and photographs.

David Wood, formerly of Stouffville, spent nine hours on a bus travelling from his home near Quebec City on Sunday. Arriving in Stouffville hours ahead of schedule, Wood decided to go

to his parents' church to surprise them.

At the Sunoco Station plaza on Main Street, Wood set his two pieces of luggage down, took a few steps forward and looked in a store window. When Wood stepped back, the luggage was gone.

While his clothes and the gifts can be replaced, Wood is upset about the loss of the photographs.

Wood left Stouffville a year ago to

study French. The photographs were taken during the course of the year, including shots of the ice storm.

"I'd brought them with me because I was going to scan them on the computer. They mean nothing to others, but a great deal to me."

Anyone with any information about the stolen suitcases, are urged to call Wood at 640-3457.

DAY FOR GOODBYES



Ballantrae Public School said goodbye to two members of their school last week.

In photo at right, Chris Pavlovic, on an exchange visit from Australia, sits among her students during the Ballantrae Public School Christmas concert Friday, Dec. 18.

Meanwhile, Marg Crichton, left, is set to retire from her career in education at Ballantrae.

STAFF PHOTOS/
SJOERD WITTEVEEN



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