

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
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OPINION

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EDITORIAL

Let's make 1999
a springboard to
the new millennium

It's at this time of year that people pause to reflect on their lives. They relish their accomplishments, review their mistakes, take stock of their blessings, vow to resolve conflicts and correct bad habits.

As we approach a new year, it's not a bad idea to measure ourselves against our goals. We live and we learn each year, becoming better people with each experience we have.

This new year will be marked with a heightened desire to achieve and improve and grow. Think about it for a moment — we're talking about how we live the last year of a millennium.

Individually, we can work on the goals — personal and professional — we've been putting off. We can strive to be better people. We can do more for our families and our communities.

And our elected officials can make 1999 a special year for York Region by doing the same thing — taking stock of a few problems and addressing them for us.

The Official Plan Report Card process, an assessment by the public of how the region is meeting its planning goals, has given politicians and administrators some idea of what's important to residents.

Green space — or lack of it — is a major concern for residents. Report card participants repeatedly noted disappearing green space as a matter that needs to be addressed in our development-driven communities.

Residents want planners to preserve the environment, include pedestrian pathways in urban areas, set aside land for parks and play areas in residential developments. Keep as much green as possible, while carefully planning our region's growth.

In 1999, regional officials can make green space a priority in development projects for the future.

Transportation or, perhaps, gridlock has residents fuming. Do something about the horrid transportation options, commuters plead. The highways and regional roads are jammed each day at rush hours. Seamless public transportation within the region is still a dream.

What can officials do? Work, in 1999, to develop a cohesive regional public transportation network — buses without borders, so to speak — that will carry residents from one corner of the region to the other efficiently.

Better community design is also a key point for residents in York Region. The majority of residents who participated in the survey would prefer to see, in future developments, a mix of housing types, sizes and densities.

Respondents felt that all the houses built in the 1970s and '80s in York Region look the same — these respondents also praised the design of communities such as Cornell, Angus Glen and Bayview Wellington, which incorporate a community feel.

In 1999, our regional government can actively pursue this dream, and wise developers will do likewise.

If homebuyers want a community feeling, they'll purchase their homes from builders who provide it. The region can effectively police density and style; developers can provide what buyers are looking for.

Economic development is a concern for residents. Many respondents told the region that it should continue to invest in initiatives that support economic development.

Twenty-five per cent of the participants in the survey indicated the region should work to attract more business.

In 1999, our regional government can continue its economic development process, actively marketing York Region to investors around the world, inviting businesses to make York Region home, developing multi-media programs to boost the region's public image and encourage business to look closely at what we have to offer.

There are many other challenges the region faces in 1999 ... and thereafter.

Delivery of human services — that is, social, health, police, hospital and education — is an issue for residents. Regional officials must make sure all of those involved understand the public's concerns.

Our changing multicultural face also poses some problems for our government. Ensuring all residents have equal access to services as they make York Region their home is an important issue.

Ultimately, residents have to recognize that our rapidly growing region is experiencing some growing pains, but the report card process helps prepare administrators and politicians for the work that lies ahead.

And that's what 1999 should be about. As it reflects on the successes and failures of 1998, regional council has the opportunity to lay the foundation for a bright, new millennium.

Let's make 1999 a springboard to the future.



DOUG DEVINE

Year had more
lowlights
than highlights

Despite York Region's soaring economy and phenomenal growth, 1998 hasn't been a very stellar year for local politicians and other leaders.

From our MPPs to our former police chief, from local councillors to bylaw officers, York Region's 1998 has been filled with far more lowlights than highlights.

Although I suspect Premier Mike Harris still has more supporters than detractors in York Region, there can be no denying his government's actions over the past year have done more harm than good here.

Harris has received and deserves most of the blame for the labour battles with York Region's teachers, the continuing financial woes of our hospitals and the massive tax hikes faced by many residents and small businesses.

He has also downloaded many costs and services that will have a long-term negative impact on the region's finances, including social housing, welfare, public transit and an annual bill for what he says is our share of Toronto's social costs, which cost York Region taxpayers \$93 million this year — or about \$500 per household.

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Unfortunately, our mayors and politicians — with the possible exception of Markham Mayor Don Cousens — have done an even poorer job representing the residents, especially regional chairperson Bill Fisch, who has displayed a total lack of leadership during this time of massive change.

While the mega-city's megamouthed mayor bellowed — convincing Queen's Park to both subsidize Toronto and pool social costs across the GTA — Fisch has done nothing to fight the massive tax shift that is now threatening the very existence of many York Region businesses.

Of course, any argument he may have had about York Region politicians being more frugal and responsible than the fat-cat city leaders went out the window earlier this year when the region, Newmarket and Richmond Hill councils jacked up their salaries.

Newmarket councillors deserve special mention for their despicable act of approving 30-per cent pay hikes before last November's election, but conspiring to keep it quiet until they had all been safely re-elected.

And what did Newmarket residents get from their much higher-paid councillors?

A year of sparring with their neighbours in East Gwillimbury over annexation plans, a thinly disguised attempt to steal a mega-theatre planned at Yonge Street and Green Lane.

Even if Newmarket correctly argued it is better suited to control that development, the only thing accomplished by all the bickering between the towns was that amalgamation can't come soon enough in York Region.

And both Aurora and Newmarket councils set new standards for hypocrisy as they joined the fight against being hooked into the Toronto water that already feeds the three southern York Region towns of Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan. This from the same people who have been approving massive growth in their towns for the past decade.

Here's hoping 1999 will be a better year for leadership in York.

LETTERS

Marijuana plants must
have been on steroids

Regarding your story on the huge marijuana bust in Markham last week:

I cannot sit here and read any more of this propaganda and not say something.

Since when has a garden, outdoors or indoors, been called a lab? Were these people doing scientific studies? If so, why were they arrested?

The media was given a tour of one home to view the elaborate operation? This lab consisted of equipment you can buy at your corner-store nursery. I use it to grow herbs in my basement. The dill is yummy and so is the sage, basil and chives.

As for the \$6-million street value — I don't think so. I grew marijuana once, I confess.

My calculator says 6,000 plants multiplied by a quarter-ounce of clean, dried, twig and lumber and seed-free bud equals 1,500 ounces.

Sold by drug dealers on the street for the top buck in Toronto of \$260 an ounce, that equals \$390,000 — a far cry from \$6 million. I don't know how York Regional Police arrived at their figures.

Let's do the math backwards, just for fun. If the \$6 million is divided by 6,000 plants, it equals \$1,000 for each plant. Clones in Toronto go for \$10.

The \$1,000 of dope from each plant, divided by \$260 equals almost four ounces of pot from each plant. Those plants must have been on steroids, or radioactive or something, to produce such a high yield. Then a police spokesman said the effects of drugs on the community is immeasurable. Is that because our system of arrest and incarceration for harmless pot smokers is a losing war?

I have never seen any harm caused by cannabis. Have you?

I haven't seen any hemp bar fights, and hemp hit-and-runs or hemp deaths. These people seem to sit quietly with weird music in the background and a pizza box attached to their smiling faces.

Then the police spokesman says, "It's gratifying to know \$6 million worth of drugs is off the street."

Why? I'd rather have my kid smoke pot than drink booze or do other drugs, like cigarettes, cocaine or heroin.

Many people use marijuana as medicine very effectively. Is it right to deny these people something organic that works for them in spite

of pot's prohibition? I think it's time we all realized that cannabis is here to stay. It's only been around for thousands of years. For many, it's the responsible drug of choice.

STEPHEN JOHN VANDEKEMP
BRADFORD

America should end
impeachment madness

Merry Christmas America. Thanks for hastening to plunge the world into chaos.

President Bill Clinton committed an immoral behaviour, for which God already forgave him, so why do you persecute him?

The president's accusers are like the Scribes and the Pharisees — wolves in sheep's clothing, and I might add, with skeletons in their closets.

He will be your second president of the two most popular presidents to leave office in an untimely manner. The first being President John F. Kennedy.

Why add to turmoil already awaiting us all in the year 2000?

I am very disappointed in your poor judgment, America. Please end this madness now.

F. FERGUSON
MARKHAM

Scouting group says
thanks to supporters

The 5th Markham Venturers would like to sincerely thank a number of folks for all their help in getting our float into the Markham Santa Claus Parade.

We are indebted to Jeff Mittman for the guidance, teaching and support he provided to a group of beginner carpenters and artists.

We would also like to thank Mitman Carriers Inc. for the space, tool use and supplies that were so generously donated. Jeff's dedication to Scouting and the Markham community were so evident in this year's parade.

We are also grateful to our other supporters who helped with paint

The Stouffville Tribune welcomes your letters. All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. We reserve the right to publish or not publish and to edit as necessary. Write Letters to the Editor, 37 Sandford Dr., Suite 306, Stouffville, Ont. L4A 7X5.

and wrapping paper.

The Markham Kinsmen Santa Claus Parade is truly a community effort supported by many people.

Thank you to everyone who helped make it so special.

THE 5TH MARKHAM VENTURERS

Illegal dumping not
being taken seriously

For years, municipalities shrugged off their responsibility on the illegal dumping for garbage.

If a citizen saw or caught a person dumping garbage illegally anywhere, he or she did not know where to call. If they called the police, the answer would be that is private property, and the police cannot do anything about it. The police said it was a civil matter, not a criminal matter.

If a person stole a candy bar from a store, it is a crime. But if that same person who stole the candy bar went and dumped his or her garbage on private property on a public road, causing the owner of that property an expense worth 50 times greater than the cost of the candy bar, it is not considered a criminal act.

Property owners and citizens should sue York Region's municipalities and the police force for not taking their responsibility on this matter seriously. This irresponsible behaviour by the municipalities and the police must stop immediately.

They must start upholding the law for illegal dumping by prosecuting and imposing heavy fines and jail time for repeat offenders.

STEVE PLIAKES
STOUFFVILLE

Christmas message
causes chuckle

I received something other than Christmas cards this December and I wanted to share it with your readers. I got quite a chuckle from it.

My security company advised me that York Regional Police "would not respond" in the event of an alarm at my home, unless I am registered. To register, I must pay an annual licensing fee of \$45, in "the enclosed postage paid envelope."

Funny, I thought that's what taxes were for. Happy holidays to all readers, especially York Regional Police.

IAN TOMLINSON
MARKHAM

Stouffville Tribune

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