

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
37 Sandford Dr., Suite 306, Stouffville, Ont. L4A 7X5

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EDITORIAL

Accident that killed child was preventable

The death of a child is always a terrible tragedy. But the accident that killed Elizabeth Hader is even more so because it could — and should — have been prevented.

The 10-year-old Aurora girl was killed when she fell off a horse at Wagon Wheel Ranch in Stouffville and was dragged for 150 metres, causing severe head injuries.

Her father, Paul Hader, said he will demand an inquest into Elizabeth's death — and we agree there should be one, if only to make the government implement the recommendations of two earlier inquests into fatal riding accidents involving children.

After the death of 12-year-old Jamie Shaw in 1985, a coroner's jury recommended improvements to safety gear for riding stables. An inquest in 1977 had produced similar recommendations.

And yet many public riding stables, including the Wagon Wheel ranch, do not provide helmets or require riders to wear one — not even children or other inexperienced riders.

This reality makes no sense, especially in a province that already requires children to wear helmets when riding bicycles. After all, horses are larger than bikes and can go faster.

The lack of a helmet wasn't the only safety issue that contributed to Elizabeth's needless death.

Witnesses say the girl's foot slipped through the stirrup as she fell, trapping her as the horse panicked and bolted.

There are stirrups available that hold the rider's foot in place, and there are breakaway stirrups that would have let go when the horse started to drag her. But neither stirrup was used at the ranch.

Nor was Elizabeth wearing a boot with a heel, which could have prevented her foot from slipping through the stirrup.

Her father also questions whether there were enough guides on hand to monitor the safety of the 15 children on the ride. He believes that if there were more guides, someone might have reached Elizabeth before her injuries were too severe.

An inquest is needed to establish whether these were factors in Elizabeth's death.

However, the Association of Riding Establishments has been lobbying the province on these issues since 1996, when a lack of funding led the Harris government to abandon official standards for rider safety and horse welfare.

The association is calling for requirements that riders wear correctly fitting helmets, with an attached harness and appropriate foot wear, including a boot with a heel.

It should be noted that the Wagon Wheel has operated for 47 years without a serious accident. And, indeed, three fatalities province-wide in 22 years is not an epidemic.

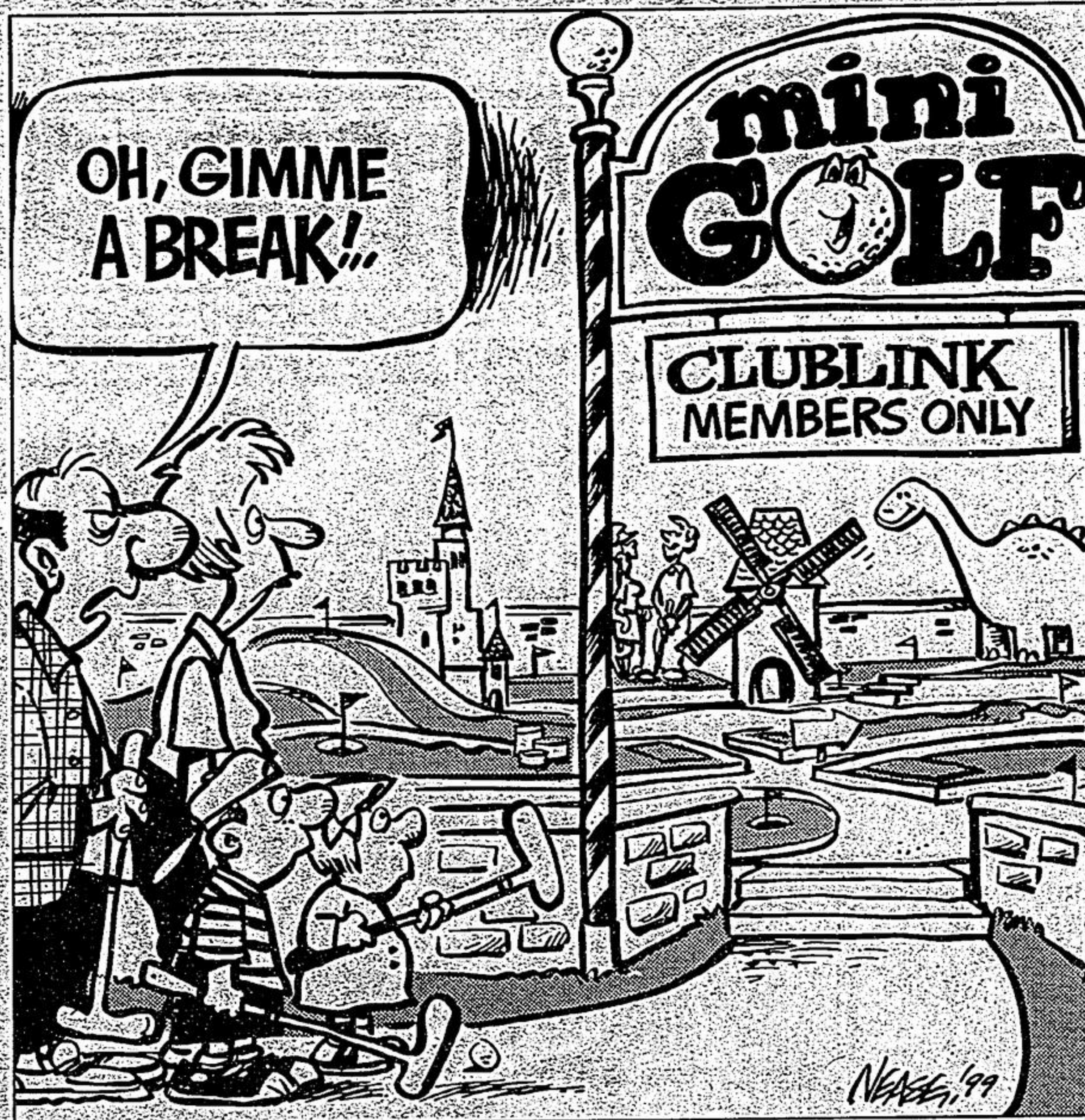
But that will be little comfort to Elizabeth's family. It only makes sense to do everything we can to protect children.

It's important to remember that a horse, no matter how well trained, is still an animal — capable of unpredictable behaviour. Riding stables, particularly those that cater to children, should have clearly established guidelines to ensure safety.

Elizabeth's death also serves as a sad reminder that parents must remain vigilant about the safety of their children's recreational activities.

There's no way to prevent all accidents, but there's no excuse for not learning from our mistakes.

OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Earth deserves more

Re: *Province must step in to protect precious moraine*, column, March 25

The madness of our own commercially manufactured lives is threatening our capacity to think rationally and act responsibly.

In an ever-increasing abdication of our intelligent choice as biological creatures, we have allowed a minute perverted sector of the elite of our society to dictate the parameters of our existence.

How many of us in the region, and surrounding municipalities would actually benefit from the housing projects now being proposed, as compared to the amount of us who enjoy the sight of something green and natural?

The leaders at all levels of government have pimped for the unimpeded, almighty dollar at the expense of the very soul and lifeblood of our existence — clean air, water and uncontaminated food.

Take away these and no mansion anywhere can sustain life.

We, as a society, have been so numbed by the pressures of "making it" that we can no longer feel the full terror of the reality of a dying universe around us. Our children sense it, yet are helpless to effect the changes necessary.

Stop it, people. We are, after all, creatures of evolution; we came out of the very molecules that created the stars, of what fashions the mountain and which now courses through our veins.

Would you allow bullies to repeatedly beat up on your child? Then why let these bullies beat up on our mother — Mother Earth?

MARIE BOMBARDIER
MARKHAM

Walker stalked

It is a sad statement about society when a person cannot go for a morning walk without being terrorized. Is reason and sensibility gone from mainstream society?

I have lived in Stouffville for 12 years and have been taking the same morning walk for years.

On April 13 I was harassed. A black truck with very dark tinted windows slowed as it approached me. I stepped on to the curb (no sidewalks) and turned to avoid the glaring lights. I continued on my walk. This vehicle turned around and drove by me four more times.

If that was not enough, another vehicle with dark tinted windows joined the first. I knocked on the door of a home. I needed to call the police. I was clearly in danger.

One of the people in the vehicles finally rolled down the window. She clearly saw herself as a neighbourhood watch.

Think about it: A person staggering down the road or hiding furtively behind bushes is cause for alarm. Someone casually walking down the street is not.

Would you think you and your children being preyed upon by two vehicles with dark tinted windows as acceptable?

If you thought something was wrong, why did you not ask if you could help?

You were stalking. There is a law against what you did and there should be one against vehicles having so darkly tinted windows.

I have your plate numbers and will call the police if I see you or your cohort stalking anyone again.

D. MACASKILL
STOUFFVILLE



Doug Devine

Looming transit crisis set for York Region

York Region residents who don't work south of Steeles Avenue were no doubt sighing with relief earlier this week as they watched news reports of the havoc the two-day TTC strike caused on Toronto's roads.

But wait. Before we get too smug about our relatively chaos-free commutes to work in York Region, we may want to gaze a few years down the road at our own gridlocked future. And unlike Toronto, our traffic nightmare didn't end when the strike was settled.

With another 400,000 people moving into the region over the next 20 years — a 57-per-cent increase over our current population — our already congested roads will make Toronto streets look like a drive in the park. More importantly, unlike Toronto, York Region will have to solve its transportation problems without financial assistance from the province. That's because, as part of its massive education restructuring, the Mike Harris government divested itself of all transit and transportation funding. Those costs are now totally borne by municipal taxpayers.

And, again unlike Toronto, those costs are destined to skyrocket as York Region becomes a major metropolitan area. By the time Toronto reached a population of 1 million, it had already built two subway lines that helped keep thousands of people out of their cars and off the streets.

If York Region expects to avoid total gridlock during rush hours, it will need some sort of mass transit system — one running east-west in the south and one running north-south at least as far north as Aurora. Luckily, there are two transit corridors reserved for such a purpose, along Hwys. 407 and 404. Both could be used for a high-capacity, light-rail transit system that could hook into Toronto's systems.

But an above-ground rapid transit system won't come cheap. The stations alone will cost millions. Which, of course, raises the larger question: Will a majority of York Region politicians ever support the construction of rapid transit — no matter how badly it's needed?

Not if the current government structure continues. The parochial self-interests of our nine municipalities will come first.

All of which spells disaster for any York Region residents who travel more than five feet to get to work. Considering the number of cities around the world we can look to for examples and advice, it's amazing how poor a job we've done planning the GTA.

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Serving the community since 1888

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The Stouffville Tribune, published every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, is one of the Metroland Publishing and Distributing Ltd. group of newspapers, which includes the Ajax/Pickering News Advertiser, Alliston Herald/Courier, Barrie Advance, Barry's Bay This Week, Bolton Enterprise, Brampton Guardian, Burlington Shopping News, Burlington Post, City Parent, Collingwood/Wasaga Connection, East York Mirror, Erin Advocate/Country Routes, Etobicoke Guardian, Flamborough Post, Georgetown Independent/Acton Free Press, Kingston This Week, Lindsay This Week, Markham Economist & Sun, Midland/Penetanguishene Mirror, Milton Canadian Champion, Milton Shopping News, Mississauga News, Newmarket-Aurora, Georgina Era-Banner, Northumberland News, North York Mirror, Oakville Beaver, Oakville Shopping News, Onilia Today, Oshawa/Whitby/Clarington/Port Perry This Week, Peterborough This Week, Richmond Hill/Thornhill/Vaughan Liberal, Scarborough Mirror, Today's Seniors, Uxbridge Tribune and City of York Guardian.

