

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
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OPINION

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Columnist

School violence hits frighteningly close to home

But for a twist of fate, would Markham have joined the tragic hall of infamy that includes Tabor, Alta and Columbine high school in Colorado?

I know I sound melodramatic, but there have been far too many disturbing incidents involving youth and violence in the past year, far too close to home.

I know I'm not the only parent feeling edgy about this subject at the moment. I can't forget Jonathan Wamback, still struggling to recover from brain injuries he received after being beaten up in a Newmarket park last summer.

And Matti Baranovski, beaten to death last month in a Bathurst Street-Finch Avenue area park.

And there was the Newmarket elementary school, which saw two students arrested after a bomb threat was received by fax last spring.

On Friday, a teenager was arrested after his brother was stabbed at Middlefield Collegiate in Markham.

And last week, a 17-year-old former Markham District High School student was arrested after threatening to shoot students and burn down a house. After his arrest, his parents turned in the nine rifles they had in their home.

It sends cold shivers through you, doesn't it? How close did we come to a tragedy of enormous proportion?

Am I overreacting? Emotional? Maybe so, but it's by recognizing and reacting to these feelings that we can avert tragedies.

The last thing we should do is sweep our unease under the rug.

We must be in the faces of our young people.

According to York Region public school board spokesperson Brian Jamieson, educators, students and school councils are now learning through workshops to be alert to the signs that indicate a young person may be dangerous, to himself or others.

Just in case the images that filled TV screens and newspapers following the slaughter at Columbine are beginning to fade, let's remind ourselves that all of us — parents, siblings, friends, teachers, neighbours — have a part to play here. We must pay attention to what's going on around us and we must speak up about our fears, unease and concern.

"We can't afford to take anything for granted anymore," underlines York Regional Police Det. Sgt. Wayne Kalinski. "We took (this incident) seriously from the beginning," he said.

Officers in the Markham district's CORE (Community Oriented Response) unit had heard the word on the street that threats had been made. After students came forward with the details they were quick to make an arrest.

We will never know just how thankful we should be for that.



LETTERS

Rain darkened festival of lights, but did not dampen spirits

Re: *Festival of lights short on lustre for Markham resident*, Letters, Dec. 2.

Unfortunately, our annual Festival of Lights was all but rained out this year. A great many of our entertainers, vendors and activities had to be cancelled due to the rain. As well, major lighting had to be disconnected for safety reasons due to the weather.

All of this indeed made for a darker street than is normally enjoyed for our festival. Old tree lighting was removed for two reasons: dying trees have been removed anticipating the planting of new trees in 2000, and vandalism to the lighting on remaining trees forced a change.

The new lighting on the street has created a lot of excitement in the community and many positive comments have been received. Next year's initiatives will allow an even more spectacular display.

If you have further comments, good or bad, please feel free at any time to contact the Markham Village BIA at 472-2462.

To the thousands of people who did turn out, we thank you and hope you had an enjoyable evening.

FRANKIE ROSE
MARKHAM VILLAGE BIA
BEAUTIFICATION COMMITTEE

Teachers play key role in student achievement

Re: *Crosby students tops in test*, Nov. 27.

The article was, in general, a fair representation of our discussion about EQAO test results.

In response to the question about how I would "account" for the Roy H. Crosby results, I identified three factors: capable and motivated students, supportive parents and strong staff.

I am sure your reporter is faced with a number of challenges in preparing such an article and she did not intend to overlook the role teachers play in student achievement.

The teachers at this school know that their conscientious and skillful work is valued by the community. Specifically, in the past three years the staff has worked hard to implement the

changes brought about by the Ontario curriculum.

If our grades 3 and 6 students were successful in the 1998 EQAO tests, it is due, in equal part, to the talent and dedication of their teachers.

CHARLES SMITH
PRINCIPAL, ROY H. CROSBY PUBLIC SCHOOL

Future of Oak Ridges ecosystem depends on our help

Re: *Protesters arrested as clearcutting begins*, Nov. 30.

I must thank reporter Mike Adler and photographer Jim Ross for their excellent coverage of the Jefferson Forest protest and the Markham Economist & Sun for its thorough coverage of the Oak Ridges Moraine issue in general.

As one of the protesters trying to protect part of the forest from being cut down, I was encouraged by the support expressed by motorists as they drove by the site last week.

If the hundreds of people honking and waving are any indication, many York Region residents want this area protected, and with good reason.

As the largest natural remnant of the Oak Ridges Moraine in Richmond Hill, the Jefferson Forest area contains many of the headwaters of the Rouge River watershed and some of the highest concentrations of rare plant and animal species anywhere in the region.

The forest is home to old-growth trees, white-tailed deer, cottontail rabbits, coyotes, yellow-spotted salamanders and interior dwelling bird species such as the scarlet tanager, which cannot survive in forests fragmented by urbanization.

The health of this wonderful ecosystem has an impact on everything downstream, including Markham's Rouge Park.

Unfortunately, it is too late to save the section of forest that was clear-cut last week, but it is not too late to stop the Bayview Avenue extension from being built next spring. If constructed, this road will not only destroy habitat in its path, it will open up the rest of the 800-acre forest to development. We must stop this from happening.

Over the past 15 or so years, more than 1.5 million trees have been cut down in York Region. We simply can't afford to lose anymore.

I urge everyone who cares about clean rivers, green space and forest cover to write or call Premier Mike Harris, asking him to stop the Bayview Extension, halt development on the moraine and create a 2,700-acre Kettle Lakes Park that would protect Jefferson Forest and the headwaters of the Rouge Valley System.

For more information on how you can help, please call 780-3938.

As members of the young public, we have tremendous power to effect change and guarantee our children's future. Let's use it.

RAMONA WALL
RICHMOND HILL

LETTERS POLICY

Stouffville Tribune welcomes your letters. All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The newspaper reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space.

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