

## MEET YOUR NEIGHBOURS

Notable Neighbours is a weekly column in the Stouffville Tribune profiling interesting residents of Stouffville. If you know of someone whose story would be of interest, please call Janet Richards at 642-3482.

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# For crying out loud

STOUFFVILLE'S OFFICIAL TOWN CRIER IS NOT SHY ABOUT GIVING A SHOUT OUT

BY JANET RICHARDS  
Correspondent

It's not exactly a quiet evening at home.

A writer asking questions, a photographer snapping shots and the cable installer running wires for your Internet hook-up. Marcel Bossi doesn't seem bothered by the activity, but of course he is used to crowds and attention. You may have seen him at the Strawberry Festival, the Santa Claus parade or other events around town.

If you haven't seen him, you've probably heard him.

This June will mark Bossi's 10th anniversary as Whitchurch-Stouffville's first official town crier. He became interested in the position after working with Markham town crier John Webster, whom he knew through the Optimist Club in Markham.

Webster was set to host the provincial town crier championships and recruited Bossi to help him out with the administration of the event.

After meeting the other criers, Bossi was hooked. Bossi asked if Stouffville had a town crier and approached then mayor Fran Sainsbury about the idea.

"I petitioned council and started doing the job unofficially," said Bossi.

After two other candidates for the position dropped out, Bossi was appointed by bylaw in June 1990.

Researching events and writing his own proclamations, some in poetic form, "allows me to exercise my limited literary skills," Bossi said.

The role of town crier also takes Bossi around the province and the world as he takes part in competitions. At one time Bossi says he was known in the town crier community as "the bridesmaid". This was after eight consecutive second-place finishes at competitions. One of those was in his first international competition, where he came in second to Webster.

This year's provincial town crier championship will be held in Wainfleet near Welland during the Marshville Heritage Festival in September. Wainfleet has hosted the event six times.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Town crier Marcel Bossi is never far out of character, even when watching TV at home.

and Bossi placed first in three of those times.

"You do a 'home cry' and then you draw two business cards," Bossi said. "You then go and interview the store owners and prepare a cry promoting their business. Last time I had to do cries for a chocolate shop and a lingerie outfitter."

*You then go and interview the store owners and prepare a cry promoting their business. Last time I had to do cries for a chocolate shop and a lingerie outfitter.*

In international competition, Bossi has placed 11th (while suffering from laryngitis) in Sydney, B.C., during the 1997 World Town Crier Championships.

Although it can be subjective, judging in the competitions is based on five points: volume, clarity, content, attention-getting and deportment.

Town criers were originally given their post in lieu of a pension in Britain. They would issue their proclamations in front of the local pub and post their letter on the door. They were then given ale and a meal in the pub.

Bossi says his town crier is "an upper middle class gentleman". He researched Stouffville's history and worked with the Stouffville Historical Society and Ann of Ann's Fabrics to make a costume that is a compilation of clothing from 1760 to 1780, made in the town colours.

The uniform is a way of promoting the Stouffville community, which is Bossi's favourite thing about the position. Bossi even flies in his uniform (he can't risk not having it for competitions if his luggage goes missing).

"I take greetings from Stouffville wherever I go," he said, adding that it gives people a flavour of where you come from.

It isn't hard for Bossi to promote Stouffville because he genuinely enjoys living in the town. "I like the community atmosphere and the behaviour of the residents toward each other."

The opportunity to travel and to stay with town criers in their own countries and to host them here in return are the most interesting aspects of the role to Bossi.

"There is a great diversity among town criers," he said. "There are sanitary engineers, judges, surgeons. You never know exactly who you'll meet or in what circumstance."

Bossi himself is a business systems analyst for the international insurance division of a major bank.

Even with all of his travelling, his town crier responsibilities and a full-time job, Bossi still finds time to squeeze in a few more activities.

He serves as secretary for the Ontario Guild of Town Criers. Hockey, baseball, and curling with some friends from the legion are also part of his schedule, and hobbies include photography, web design, a computer golf league and playing bridge over the Internet with people from around the world.

As for how to fit it all in, "you prioritize and make time," he said.

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