

Win a \$75 spending spree at country decorating show

Craft lovers are invited to celebrate the warmth of spring in the country at the Markham Country Decorating and Collectibles Show and Sale coming to Markham Fairgrounds March 17 to 19.

The show houses more than 130 exhibitors in three buildings throughout the weekend, and offers a varied selection of country furnishing, folk art, crafts, antiques and decorations suitable for the home and as unique gift ideas.

The show runs March 17 from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., and March 18 and 19 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tickets are \$8 for adults, \$7 for seniors and \$2 for children under the age of 12.

Free parking will be available and

hourly door prizes will be donated by exhibitors throughout the weekend.

For further information about the show, call (905) 649-2480.

READER CONTEST

Residents wanting to win the grand prize of a \$75 shopping spree or one of 25 free admission passes to the show can send us their country decorating idea. We will hold a random draw for the prizes Tuesday and inform the winners by phone.

Entries must include a daytime phone number. Send submissions to the Economist & Sun/Tribune, 9 Heritage Rd., Markham, Ont., L3P 1M3, or fax to 294-1538.

Markham students make dean's list

ALICIA GORDON
Correspondent

The National Dean's List has recognized 64 Saginaw Valley State University (Michigan) students for their academic achievements, and two of them are York Region natives.

Shah H. Baqar of Markham, who is in the masters degree program of pre-occupational therapy, received the

honour by maintaining a 4.00 grade point average.

Katherine H. Hahn of Unionville is taking an educational specialist degree in nursing with the hopes of pursuing a career in this field. She also maintained a 4.00 grade point average.

Baqar and Hahn will be eligible to compete for \$25,000 in scholarship awards, as well as other benefits.

Inspectors keeping tabs on York Region eateries

Regional councillor calls for restaurant report

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

Everything from vermin in the kitchen to a malfunctioning buffet steam table led to five dozen charges being laid and eight restaurants being temporarily closed down in York Region last year.

But despite the bad apples, the director of York's health protection branch says the region's eateries are well monitored and generally meeting standards.

Not that there isn't more that could be done, says Oryst Zyhar.

"We're in there (inspecting restaurants) as often as we can. We're in there as often as the province mandates us to be," he said.

"Would we like to be in these places more often? Definitely. (In some cases), we have taken food, taken it to the dumpster and poured household cleaner on it."

Given the growing number of restaurants in York and the high turnover of staff, Zyhar would like to see inspectors get into more eateries to educate staff on the proper handling of food.

Ever since the Toronto Star brought repulsive conditions at some city restaurants to light — which has led to eight eateries being shut down during a two-week blitz — York residents have been concerned about the state of the region's restaurants.

While some York restaurants have failed to meet health standards, Zyhar said, Toronto eateries are more prone to problems because they are often in older buildings, making it easier for rats and cockroaches to get in.

In York, restaurants, classified as high-risk food premises, receive at least three random visits from public health inspectors a year.

Take-out shops are considered medium-risk and are inspected at least twice a year.

Low-risk operations, such as convenience stores, are inspected a minimum of once a year.

Inspectors checked 10,108 establishments last year — 528 more than provincially mandated. Of those, 1,623 were re-inspections.

Sixty-two charges were laid and eight restaurants were temporarily closed, three voluntarily, due to food safety infractions.

Newmarket Councillor Diane Humeniuk introduced a notice of motion Tuesday night calling on the region's public health department to issue a report outlining restaurants which have failed to meet standards.

Meanwhile, Markham Councillor Gord Landon has received several inquiries from worried residents.



GORD LANDON: Markham councillor has received many calls about restaurant conditions.

"I'm getting a lot of calls from constituents," said Landon, who sent a letter this week to medical officer of health Dr. Helena Jaczek asking about restaurant conditions here.

"Some people are telling me they're afraid to go out and eat. It's not good for business."

Landon is confident York has "a pretty good inspection system" here, but he wants that confirmed.

"Steeles Avenue doesn't necessarily mean restaurants on one side are good and they're not good on the other side."

'When you cross Steeles, you will know you are eating at a restaurant that is checked on a very regular basis. From our perspective, we've kept close tabs. If a restaurant is open, it has passed the test.'

Bill Fisch
Regional Chairperson

But Richmond Hill resident Richard Hodges isn't so sure York eateries are meeting health standards.

He detailed many infractions in a letter to the editor, from a waitress who kept letting her long hair fall into food to a fast food outlet that failed to instruct teenagers to get their snowy boots off the table.

"There seems to be a great lack of handling food with utensils, almost no use of plastic gloves and no thought to covering up long hair," said Hodges, who has been in catering for almost 45 years.

"Where are all the health and hygiene officers, the food inspectors? Do we have any at all?"

Hodges isn't the only one who has witnessed poor health standards in regional restaurants.

"Quite frankly, I have been in the back of a couple and I

would be afraid to eat in there," said one municipal official who asked not to be named.

But regional chairperson Bill Fisch said conditions in York are far better than in Toronto.

"On the contrary. When you cross Steeles, you will know you are eating at a restaurant that is checked on a very regular basis," he said. "From our perspective, we've kept close tabs. If a restaurant is open, it has passed the test."

"We make sure vermin and rodents (aren't present) and food is being handled appropriately from a health perspective. We ensure there is clean equipment. We ensure there are proper handwashing facilities."

In order to meet demand caused by a growing number of York restaurants, regional council last fall hired three additional inspectors, bringing the total to 19.

Vaughan Councillor Joyce Frustaglio, chairperson of the region's health committee, said councillors will discuss the issue at a March 23 committee meeting.

"I was assured we don't have these problems (experienced by some Toronto restaurants). Our health inspectors are very vigilant. But what vigilante means at this point, I don't know," she said.

"We will assure ourselves our health inspectors are doing an excellent job and our restaurants are clean. Maybe our restaurants are not as clean as we want them to be or at the same level, but they pass health standards."

In response to public concerns, some York politicians would like to introduce a system requiring eateries to post their most recent health inspections for customers to see.

"You could have a positive program that says this restaurant meets all the requirements of the Public Health Act and has never had a problem," Landon said.

"I think that's a really great idea. I think it should be very public."

Zyhar provided some tips to help customers choose clean and healthy restaurants.

Are lights kept low? Maybe it's not just for atmosphere. Are the bathrooms clean? If not, it might be an indication the kitchen isn't either.

How clean are the floors, the tables?

In fast food places, are the employees wearing plastic gloves or washing their hands, especially after handling money or other objects?

Despite the concerns, Zyhar believes the region has a good system in place to keep restaurant owners on their toes.

"I'm confident in my staff. They're out there."

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