

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
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EDITORIAL

Finding the message in Columbine's tragedy

It's been a year since unspeakable tragedy struck the school community of Columbine.

Thirteen people murdered. Twenty-three injured. Two teenaged gunmen killed themselves.

A day that parents in the tiny Colorado community would prefer to have never experienced, a day they — and the rest of the world — simply cannot forget.

As the world reflects, one year later, on Columbine, there's sadness, grief and an inability to comprehend how such an event could ever come to fruition, how so much evil could live in the hearts and minds of two boys.

Parents fear copycats, even here in York Region. Understandably, they can't bear the thought that some freak may just decide their child's school is the next target for annihilation on a grand scale, due to some perceived slight from the popular crowd.

And, unfortunately, you're bound to get the practical jokers, the teens who may want a day off or who think it's cool to see adults scrambling to safeguard other children against imaginary bogeymen.

The threats, in all likelihood, are nothing. Thankfully, you won't see educators taking that chance. They'll be using the policy and procedures they have in place to ensure school is safe.

And police forces today don't take these threats idly, either. We encourage them to do what they need to do to find the perpetrators.

So what do we — the parents, the families, the citizens — do about these threats?

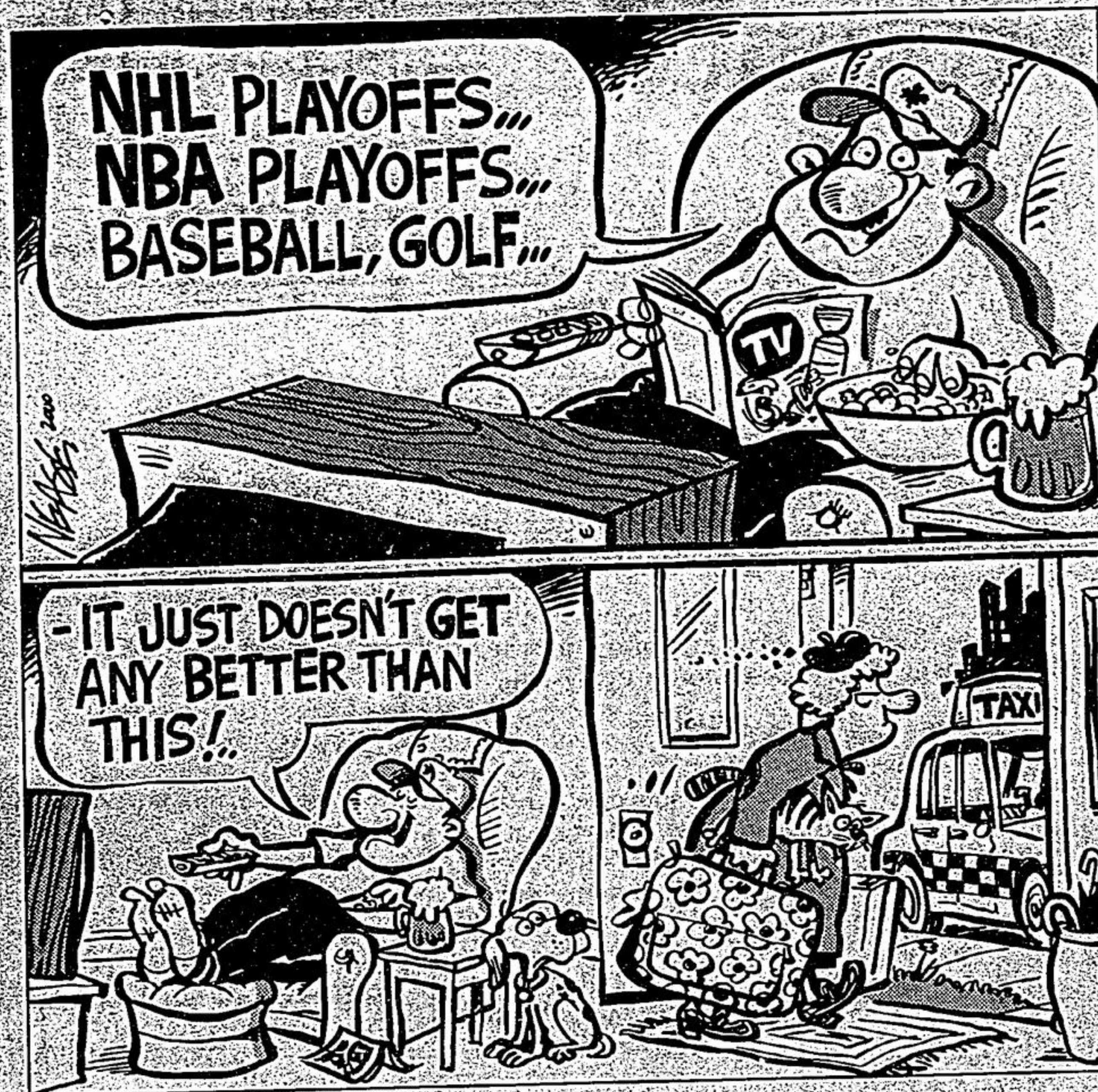
The students who have talked to us have told us it's all nonsense. That nothing's going to happen. That we shouldn't be duped into giving pranksters their taste of front-page fame. We certainly hope, as tuned in as they are, that they're right.

What we can do is talk to our teenagers. Find out what's happening in their lives. Talk to them about Columbine and what we can learn from that tragedy.

Let them know that using the public fear about Columbine to empty a school or get some attention isn't appropriate or acceptable behaviour.

Show that you care.

OPINION



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David Teetzel

Developers create the demand for hospital services

York Region's finance committee is to meet today to figure out what to do with \$15 million in capital reserves.

It shouldn't take long

The money will almost certainly be spent on hospital expansion projects. The only question is where regional councillors will find \$6 million more to meet the commitments to the hospitals.

The region has committed \$62.5 million to badly needed construction projects at York Central, York County and Markham-Stouffville hospitals, worth about \$202 million.

More than \$40 million of the region's share will come from your property taxes, creating an increase of about \$16 for the average homeowner.

The remaining \$20.8 million was to be paid in a voluntary levy of \$463 on every new home in the region. That would seem to be fair, since the expansions are necessary because of growth.

York Region officials were pretty confident the Urban Development Institute would support this plan back in early March, when it was announced.

But last week, the UDI's Stephen Kaiser told regional councillors he's "drawing a bit of a line in the sand" over voluntary payments. The development industry won't pay hospital levies, but it will lobby the province to kick in more money for the projects.

For the record, the province is paying \$124.8 million — 62 per cent of the bill for the expansions.

So what to do about the shortfall?

The developers don't want to kick in the money, the province probably won't do it — and can't really be expected to.

The hospitals are already raising \$8.5 million themselves and there are limits to how much can be brought in through bake sales and fundraising dinners.

Then there's us, the taxpayers.

I certainly don't begrudge paying \$16 more on my property taxes if it means maintaining quality health care.

But if you ask me to pay more than that because the developers don't want to pay their share, I may grumble a bit.

And if, because I'm an awfully cynical fellow, I suspect the developers pulled their support for hospitals because some politicians wouldn't play ball on the Oak Ridges Moraine — well, I might grumble a lot.

So it's a darn good thing York Region has about \$15 million in capital reserves rattling around in its coffers. And it has \$23.7 million in social assistance reserves — perhaps hospitals qualify as social spending.

The region shouldn't be spending all that money. We need to have something saved for a rainy day.

But there's a flood pouring into our hospitals and the guys who are making it rain just took away their bucket.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tax cuts not worth the stress placed on education system

The April 13 front-page story, *Strike? No way, parents say*, presumes teachers, their union and boards use students as pawns.

This shows that Minister of Finance Paul Martin has bought into the taxpayer-funded \$10-million teacher-bashing ad campaign of 1997-1998.

Removing a billion dollars from Ontario schools has made our system the poorest one in Canada, all for the sake of a small tax cut.

All school personnel, including teachers, work harder and longer than in any other province, despite what our politicians say, and are already stretched to the breaking point. Even the government's Education Reform Commission says the cuts went too far and that teachers deserve a reasonable raise after eight years of frozen wages.

Now the Tories are ordering teachers to teach another class. Parents should be storming Queen's Park since it's the province which is using the students as pawns.

Teachers and students are all valiantly trying to cope with a ridiculous funding formula. Martin would be better off looking in his wallet and deciding what he would rather have, a few extra dollars or a healthy education system.

ROBERT GREENWOOD
STOUFFVILLE

There is a reason they're called sidewalks, not 'sidejogs'

Re: *Sidewalks are for runners, too*, Letters, April 8.

I'd like to respond to Rick Martell's response to my letter, *Joggers almost run down those of us who like to take a stroll*, March 25.

Does he not know everyone is allowed an opinion about different issues? For Martell to call my letter asinine and having an ignorant take on joggers was completely out of line.

He suggests the next time my friends and I take a stroll, we either step in front or behind each other. If he had read my letter properly, he would know I did move, otherwise there would have been an accident.

Martell states he is frustrated by people who feel the sidewalk is theirs and refuse to move for the oncoming runner. That's the point I'm making. Sometimes there isn't time to move out of the way, as the jogger is behind us before we know it.

I still feel the sidewalks are meant for people to walk. After all, it is a sidewalk not "side-jog."

I have nothing against joggers. I respect their love of good exercise. However, if Martell wants to enjoy the great outdoors, wouldn't a nice country road do just as well?

MARY EUSTACE
MARKHAM

LETTERS POLICY

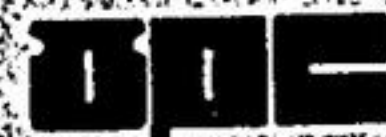
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