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Stouffville Tribune

Rouge trees planted by far north students

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

"There are no trees where I come from," Charles Gruben said Sunday in a farmer's field in Markham. He was speaking of his home on the Beaufort Sea: Tuktoyaktuk, NWT, where the closest thing to a sugar maple is small shrubs called Arctic willows creeping across the tundra. Of the 1,200 volunteers who planted

6,500 trees along a bank of the Little Rouge, Gruben — whose middle name Qummagbaalak means "person who squats by the fire" — and seven other Inuit from Canada's far North may have come furthest to help.

Students on a field trip from Aurora College in Inuvik, NWT, prepared the site for this year's 10,000 Trees for the Rouge Valley planting, digging trenches where the young trees were temporarily kept to keep their roots moist.

The northerners also put up snags — upright logs with nesting cavities for birds — with NEST Forestry of Unionville, the firm which designed the 10,000 Trees planting and arranged their trip.

After seeing Toronto and its suburbs, Norman Pierrot, a student from Fort Good Hope, NWT, said southerners show a different attitude toward their environment. In the north, he said, it's survival that matters, not money.

"We don't go cutting up our land for money," added Pierrot, who has fought forest fires for 18 years. "I find it hard to believe that people damage their own land as much."

As politicians gathered earlier to plant a ceremonial white birch, Markham Councillor Jack Heath said he regretted greatly that Hwy. 407, being extended over the Rouge River to the south, had claimed many trees in the area last week. "These were mature trees, good trees for our environment," said Heath, but added the trees planted Sunday could one day grow as tall.

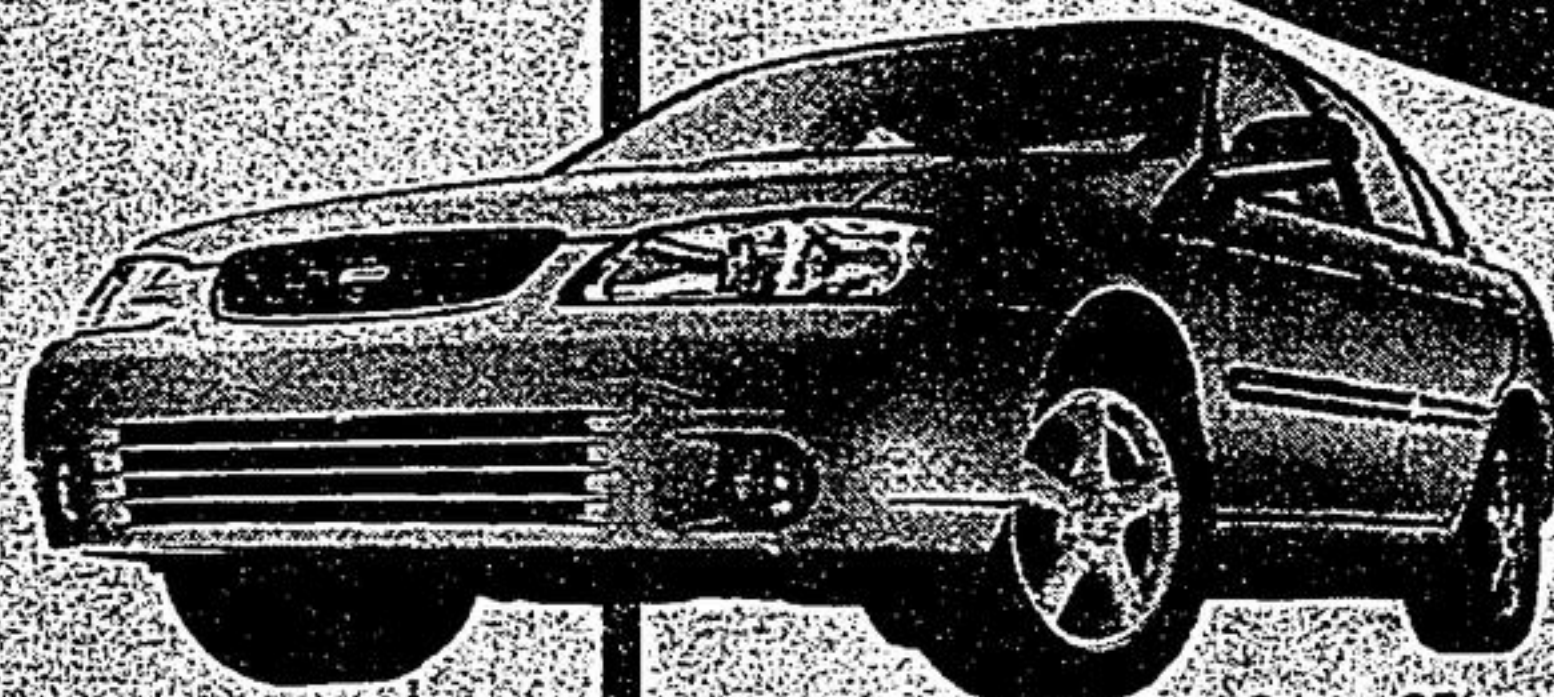
And Markham Deputy Mayor Frank Scarpitti described a planting near the highway Saturday at Milne Park Conservation Area in Markham, on land the province's Ontario Realty Corporation twice tried to sell before dedicating it to Rouge Park. "Yesterday, we planted trees instead of industrial buildings on this land," Scarpitti said.

The long-awaited plans for extending the park into Markham, Stouffville and Richmond Hill will either be finalized at a meeting this week or delayed by objections over some details. Meanwhile, development is closing in on the Rouge and its York Region tributaries.

On Sunday, Jennifer Yee, 14, of Scarborough said she gets her parents to come to the Markham planting.

"Every day they drive a car to work and it's not healthy for the environment. It's kind of a way for them to redeem themselves," she said.

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