

Markham hospital offers free flu clinics

Last year's flu outbreak tested the health-care system, doctor says

BY DAWN LIERSCH
Staff Writer

Hoping to stave off a major flu outbreak this winter, Markham health officials are offering free flu clinics beginning next month.

"This is the perfect opportunity to make an impact on the community," said Dr. Stephen McLaren, a Markham family physician and chief of family practice at Markham Stouffville Hospital.

"Instead of just taking care of our patients, we're looking at the community as a whole ... The timing is such that we can complement what family doctors are doing."

The flu — formally known as influenza — is a serious upper respiratory infection usually characterized by an abrupt onset of fever and cough, often accompanied by fatigue, muscle weakness and a hoarse voice.

The clinics have been organized by Markham Stouffville Hospital in conjunction with York Region Health Services. Although the groups began planning for flu clinics last winter during the height of flu frenzy, the health ministry has since announced it will

offer free flu vaccines to all citizens.

"That was an excellent move, to have a government take advantage of a product," he said.

McLaren said it was clear to him during last year's flu outbreak that the health care system had become overcapacitated due to a high number of flu patients.

"For a period of about three or four months, doctors were really frustrated," he said.

"There was a very rapid rise in the number of influenza (flu) cases beginning early in the season. It seemed to affect a lot of people at once."

In fact, the flu was responsible for between 70,000 and 75,000 hospital admissions in Canada, McLaren said.

Through widespread vaccination, health officials are hoping to prevent a repeat scenario.

Flu clinics will be offered in October for the elderly, those in the health care field and essential services such as firefighters and paramedics and people who are at high risk of contracting the flu such as those younger than 65 who have chronic medical conditions such as diabetes or cancer.

Clinics will be offered on weekdays on Oct. 10, 11 and 12 from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Markham Family Physicians (377 Church St., Suite 101), the Markham Medical Centre

(6633 Hwy. 7 E., Suite 214), the Markham Town Square Health Centre (8601 Warden Ave., Suite 23) and the town centre in Whitchurch-Stouffville (37 Sandiford).

'Instead of just taking care of our patients, we're looking at the community as a whole ... the timing is such that we can complement what family doctors are doing.'

The following week, clinics will be offered on Oct. 16, 17, 18 and 19 from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at Markham Family Physicians and Markham Medical Centre.

Clinics will also be offered on Saturdays on Oct. 14 and 21 at the Milliken Mills Community Centre from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and on Sundays on Oct. 15 and 22 at the Markville Mall from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Flu clinics will also be offered during the Markham Home Show at the fairgrounds (Building 1) on Sat., Oct. 21 at 2 p.m. and Sunday, Oct. 22 at 2 p.m. McLaren will also speak about sleep disorders at 1 p.m.

The clinics will be offered to the general

public on the weekdays of Nov. 20-23 from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Markham Family Physicians, the Markham Medical Centre, the Markham Town Square Health Centre and the town centre in Whitchurch-Stouffville. Clinics will also be offered the following week on weekdays from Nov. 27-30 at Markham Family Physicians and the Markham Medical Centre, on Saturdays, on Nov. 25 and Dec. 2 at Milliken Mills Community Centre from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and on Sundays, on Nov. 26 and Dec. 3 at the Markville Mall from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Those attending will receive information on the flu virus and a sticker for their medical charts.

A free information session on the flu will also be held on Oct. 10 at 7 p.m. at the Markham Stouffville Hospital auditorium.

McLaren warned those who received flu shots last year should still get vaccinated again this year because the antigens change.

Those who should not get the flu vaccine include anyone with a serious infection, illness or fever, anyone who has a severe allergy to eggs or a component of the vaccine such as thimerosal, a preservative in contact lens solution or gelatin.

For more information on the flu vaccine, call your family doctor or the York Region Health Services Health Connection Line at 1-800-361-5653.

BUSINESS AS USUAL FOR ANIMAL SHELTER

OSPACA operating out of trailers while state-of-the-art centre is built

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

Eight trailers, 30 staff members, 25 kittens.

It appears to be a makeshift operation, but it's still business as usual for the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPACA).

Officials of the animal welfare agency are overseeing the construction of a 20,000-square-foot state-of-the-art animal village on 40 acres on Woodbine Avenue, near Vivian Sideroad, in Stouffville. Until it's built, they're operating out of trailers.

While the new centre is designed to be the most prominent of its kind in North America, care given to the animals still hinges on a one on one basis.

A few days ago, 25 orphaned kittens settled into the OSPACA's temporary quarters. It is hoped that each of the kittens will be adopted into a loving home.

While others focus on the \$7.9-million construction project, Sara

Hawton's job is to make sure the public knows kittens are available. While a kitten adoption fee is \$70, the OSPACA gives a \$35 rebate to anyone showing proof of spaying. The fee includes the first set of booster shots and a personalized collar.

The new OSPACA centre is being partially funded by the proceeds from the sale of existing OSPACA property located in Newmarket.

The sale was finalized Friday, OSPACA executive assistant Linda Day reported.

Meanwhile, the new facility is expected to be ready for use in the spring. "We'll work out of the trailers this winter," said Day. "The trailers are spacious and bright."

As well as a wildlife centre, plans call for an animal care centre, a veterinary clinic, a pet day care centre, a library resource centre, a pet adoption centre, a pet supply store, a wildlife hospital, a livestock barn and a public trail where people can walk their dogs and programs including violence prevention initiatives, community services and fundraising.

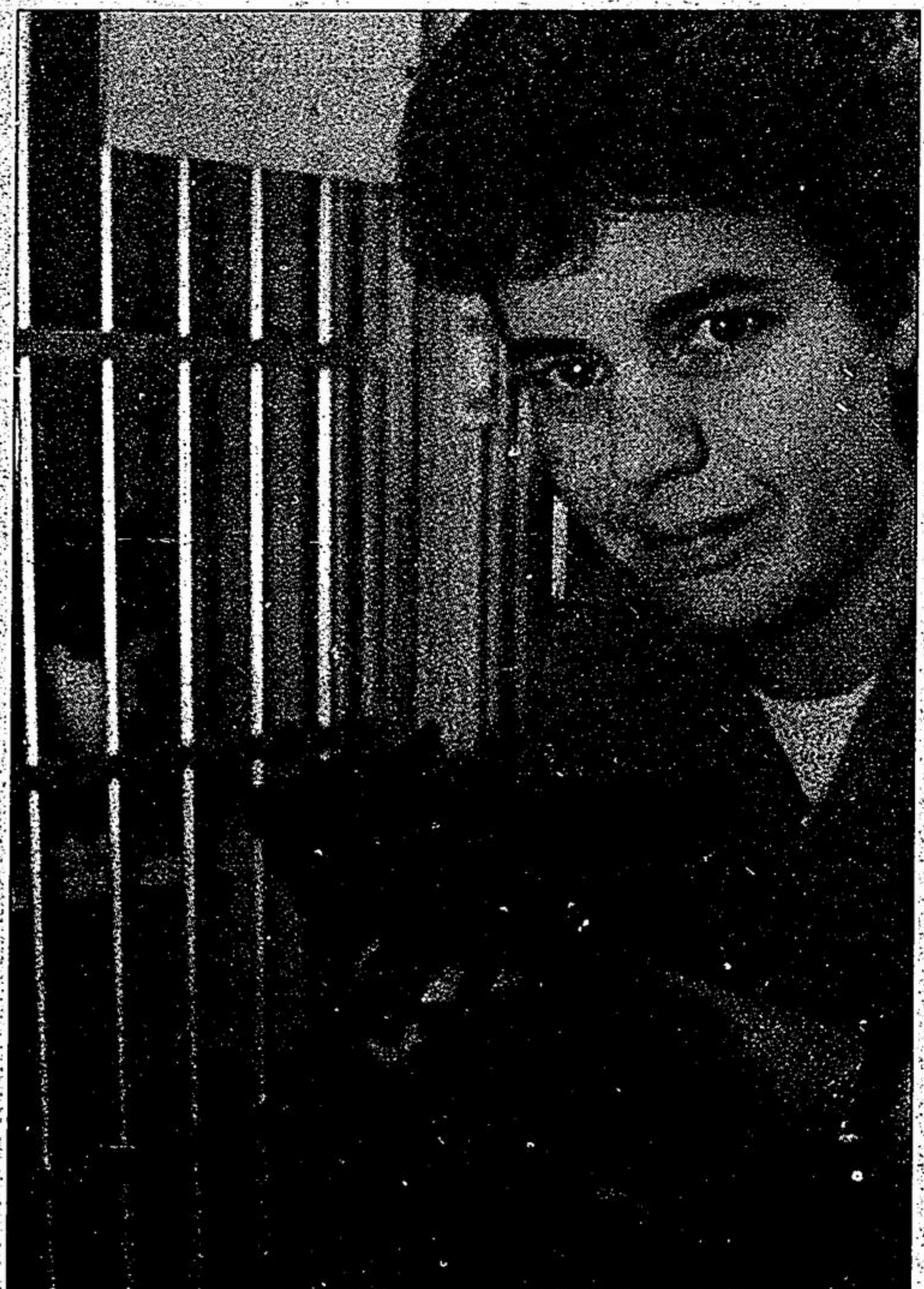
"Work is also under way on the trail system," said Day. "The public will appreciate it."

The animal services will be geared to dogs and cats and other pets. As well, the new headquarters will oversee 25 OSPACA branches, while it will be involved with its 34 affiliates.

The OSPACA helps animals by investigating cases of cruelty and neglect.

About 300 trained OSPACA investigators respond to thousands of cruelty complaints every year, while one of the OSPACA most important functions is providing temporary shelter to stray and lost, neglected and unwanted pets.

Sara Hawton (right), provincial animal care centre shelter manager of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals located on Woodbine Avenue, holds some of the more than 25 kittens up for adoption at the shelter.



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