

U.S., European criers dressing up Main Street

BY CHRIS O'BRIEN
Special

Hear ye! Hear ye! A proclamation from the Mayor: while attending this year's Unionville Village Festival, don't be concerned when you see — and hear — dozens of men and women in period costumes yelling at the tops of their lungs.

The Town of Markham is hosting the Golden Jubilee Championship of Town criers during the festival. It takes place Saturday and Sunday on Unionville Main Street. Other events include a farmer's market, music, food fair, Crazy Kraft race, parade and fun run.

"This is the 50th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II," explained John Webster, Markham's official crier. "And we represent the Queen."

Criers from across Canada, from the U.S. and from the Netherlands, Poland, England and New Zealand will meet at the Millennium bandstand in Crosby Park at noon and 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, June 1 to engage in a battle of vocal cords.

The Economist & Sun/Tribune is the event's media partner.

"We were aiming for 50 competitors and have 30 signed up right now," said Mr. Webster. "That means lots of people walking around in traditional dress."

The costuming or deportment of town criers is vital to their competition, as is attracting attention, call content, and — of course — sustained volume. Criers are evaluated on a points system for each of these aspects.

"You tend to think of the town crier as just a guy in a funny costume, but we take it very seriously," said Mr. Webster, who will not be competing as he is the host.

"I am the third generation in the community and my son and daughter are taking it up."

"It started out being about letting people know what was going on at the Markham Fair in 1987. Then Mayor Carole Bell saw it and I was appointed by the town. I've now been all over the world to compete."

Mr. Webster says town criers are usually older people, though some younger criers have entered the competition this year.

"There are university students who want to be criers, but it's rare to see. I do about 225 cries a year, it works out to about three cries per week," Mr. Webster said.

"Also, older people have a more active interest in history. I'm a historian as well as a performer."

His vocation has not been spared by the information age. Participants in this year's competition have been sent information to prepare cries on Markham-related topics. They will write their cries from online research.

Competitors need to know specific details about the town, details that Mr. Webster says many residents don't know.

"For instance all towns have a motto in Latin; ours is in English and no one knows it — it's leading while remembering."

He noted Markham is the high-tech capital of Canada. It also won the Prince of Wales award for Heritage last year, and Main Street Unionville was one rea-

son why. These facts are important for competitors to know.

The program for this year has two set cries.

"The first is about the Queen's Golden Jubilee," Mr. Webster said. "The other is what criers would be doing in their true historical usage — going up

and down the main street finding information from stores, then writing and performing cries."

The vocation of town crier is bestowed only after a long period of training.

A lot of the history associated with the position has remained since the

time of lords and ladies, and remains in the job description.

"Town criers represent the mayors," said Mr. Webster. "In actual fact, as a crier I am a protected individual."

"I tried to explain that once to a York Regional police officer, but he gave me the ticket anyway."



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1999 BMW 540i/6	Stk#U418	Black/Black leather, sport pkg., ski bag, 59,307 km.....	\$53,900
1999 BMW 540iAT	Stk#U379	Black/Black leather, Xenon, ski bag, headlamp washers, audiophile/CD, 30,434 km.....	\$57,900*
1999 BMW 740iA	Stk#U373	Jet Black/Black leather, audiophile, CD changer, 46,538 km.....	\$57,900*
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2000 BMW Z3 2.8i	Stk#U350	Topaz Blue/Black leather, automatic O.B.C., 17" cross spoke, 6,600 km.....	\$47,900
2000 BMW 323i	Stk#U285	Alpine White/Black leatherette, sport pkg. 3, heated seats, sunroof, 62,300 km.....	\$36,900
2000 BMW 323iA	Stk#U383	Steel Grey/Black leatherette, premium pkg. 2, loaded, 42,400 km.....	\$38,900*
2000 BMW 328i	Stk#8608A	Black/Black leather, premium pkg. 2, rear sunblind, rain sensor, 43,492 km.....	\$44,900
2000 BMW 328iA	Stk#U309	Black/Black leather, sport pkg. 3, wood trim, Harman Kardon, 49,900 km.....	\$44,900
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2000 BMW 740iA	Stk#9359A	Silver/Black leather, premium pkg., navigation, audiophile, 51,200 km.....	\$68,900
2000 BMW Z8	Stk#72372	Titanium Silver/Red interior, 6-speed, hard top, fully appointed, 23,000 km.....	\$175,900
2001 BMW 320i	Stk#U407	Topaz Blue/Marne Blue Cloth, 5-speed, 13,995 km.....	\$32,900
2001 BMW 325iA	Stk#U312	Orient Blue/Black leatherette, automatic, heated seats, 17,654 km.....	\$39,900
2001 BMW 325iA	Stk#U408	Black/Black, premium pkg., DSCIII, through load/ski bag, 15,205 km.....	\$43,900
2001 BMW 330iA	Stk#9329A	Silver/Grey leather, premium pkg., sport pkg., 38,100 km.....	\$48,900
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2002 BMW X5, 3.0	Stk#N9361	Topaz Blue/Black leatherette, on-board computer, 13,397 km.....	\$56,900
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