

How honest are you, York Region?

Wallet yet to be returned

BY HANNELORE VOLPE
Staff Writer

A "lost" children's wallet stayed on a suburban Stouffville street for less than 15 minutes before its "owner" was called.

A wallet "lost" in Markham on the same day is still at large.

The Stouffville wallet was left — containing a child's picture, \$8 in cash, a small necklace and the "owner's" phone number — by Economist & Sun/Tribune editor Jim Mason near the intersection of Stouffer and Millard streets on Friday.

Another similarly appointed child's wallet was left the same day in the parking lot of the Honey Bee Donuts/Father's Steakhouse and Pub plaza at McCowan Road and Hwy. 7 in Markham. No one has called to say they found that wallet.

The wallets were dropped as one of the character tests being carried out by the York Region Newspaper Group to test the honesty of residents in the region's municipalities.

The Stouffville Good Samaritans were a four-year-old-girl and her dad who were on their morning walk to Summitview Public School. "Dad, look!" said Isabelle DeMelo, a junior kindergarten student, as she spotted the wallet in front of the neighbourhood's mailboxes.

"I picked it up and saw there was \$8 inside," said Joe DeMelo, who called the number in the wallet — actually the Stouffville Sun and Tribune office.

Mr. DeMelo and his wife, Camilla, have been teaching Isabelle not to take things that don't belong to her.

Ironically, Mrs. DeMelo lost a wallet a few months ago and had it returned shortly after realizing it was gone. It dropped to the ground as she was getting into her car in front of an apartment building.

The incident was spotted by a resident of the apartment, who immediately went downstairs to retrieve it and give Mrs. DeMelo a call.

"He contacted us right away," Mr. DeMelo said.

Two of the wallets dropped by our staff writers during the latest in our series of character tests were returned with money intact.



Shopper quick to report find

BY SIMONE JOSEPH
Staff Writer

It is 1:20 p.m. on a busy pre-Christmas shopping day at Newmarket's Upper Canada Mall. I place a wallet with the horse on a ledge bordering potted plants and scurry away to a nearby bench to watch people's reaction. How long will it take for someone to rescue the wallet? I wonder.

A woman walks by with a friend, points to the wallet and says something I cannot hear but ambles on. Another woman strolls by pushing a baby carriage, looks at the wallet and keeps walking. Finally, about two minutes later, a woman with a blond ponytail picks up the wallet and walks away with it, unzipping it and looking inside.

I drop another wallet outside the entrance of a KFC on Yonge Street in Aurora, then I scuttle inside to watch people react. A few minutes later, two men who look to be in their early 20s leave the restaurant. One stoops, picks up the wallet and walks away.

By the time I get back to the office, my editor Tracy Kibble received a message about a wallet dropped in Newmarket. Someone placed it on the counter of one of Upper Canada Mall's information booths and left. When Ms Kibble asked whether the wallet still had money in it, the security guard said the \$10 was gone, but the small change was still there.

She asked the security officer if the wallet should be placed in a location where people would find

it so we could continue our experiment. When Ms Kibble spoke to mall security later, they said the wallet had been brought back several times.

Finally, I get a call from Georgina Hinksman of Orangeville. She spotted the wallet on a bench and thought to herself: "What if somebody's Christmas shopping money is in here?"

She later said she felt sympathy for the wallet owner. She would have been "devastated" if it had been her wallet that was lost.

It has been four days since I dropped the wallet in Aurora and still no phone call. If that wallet had really belonged to a child, there would be one sad kid out there.

The wallet is cheap vinyl with a picture of a horsie on the front. Inside is a photograph of a child, clippings, stickers and doodads that would be treasured by a youngster and about \$10 cash.

If you found that lying around, you would return it, wouldn't you?

In the final instalment of the York Region Newspaper Group's Test of Character, we decided to find out.

We already tested your tolerance for common forms of annoying behaviour and your willingness to help a stranger in trouble. This time out, we tested whether residents are honest enough to turn in a missing wallet.

We scattered our decoys in public places around the region. Of six wallets dropped, four were returned — two of them with all the cash. In our totally unscientific test, Stouffville and Richmond Hill aced the honesty test. The wallets were returned within an hour, cash intact.

In Newmarket and Vaughan, there seems to be a finder's fee. The wallets were turned in but the cash was removed. The other two wallets, having been dropped in Aurora and Markham last week, are still out there somewhere.

Cash taken from wallet

BY LINDA JOHNSON
Staff Writer

Lose your wallet in Richmond Hill or Thornhill and you're likely to get it back. But as for recovering your cash — that depends.

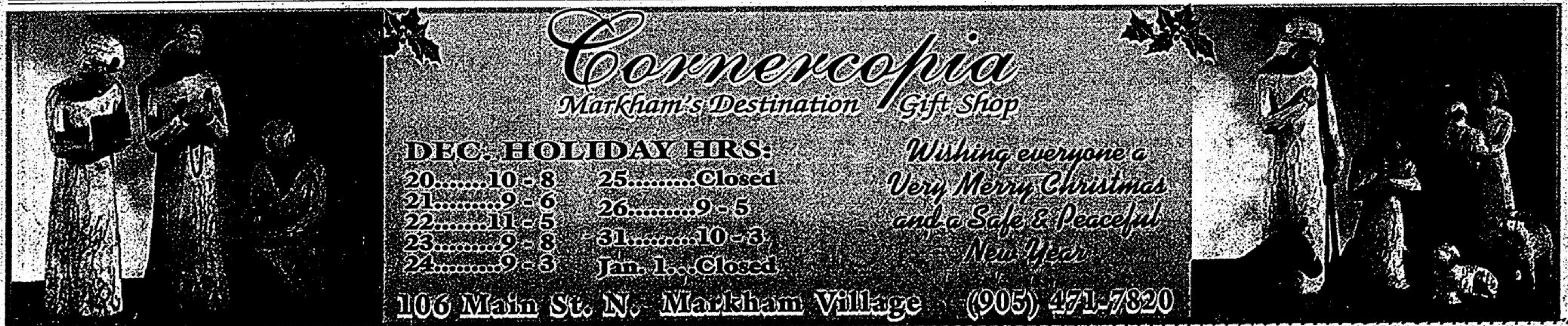
At Hillcrest Mall, a keen-eyed Richmond Hill shopper spotted the brown wallet quickly. Within an hour of being left at a seat in the mall's food court, it was gone.

The next day, its fate still uncertain, I dropped in at the customer care desk. After a quick call to the security office, the customer representative happily told me a wallet had indeed been found. The guard handed me the wallet to check and the two \$5 bills were still there.

But at The Promenade in Thornhill, the finder had other ideas. The wallet was left on a bench in front of a bank. And clearly not everyone who goes there in search of money has a bank card.

The good news was, the wallet was turned in, complete with the small change in its coin section, but the serious money was gone.

At least we recovered the picture



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Wishing everyone a
Very Merry Christmas
and a Safe & Peaceful
New Year

106 Main St. N. Markham Village (905) 471-7820