



**SUDDEN STOP:** A truck lies alongside Stouffville Road just west of Ringwood in Whitchurch-Stouffville Monday morning.

SJOERD WITTEVEN PHOTO

**TIP OF THE WEEK**

Conscience is the inner voice that warns us somebody is watching.  
*H.L. Mencken*

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## Double-hatter firefighters welcome Ontario mediator

By Joan Ransberry  
Stouffville Sun

Premier Ernie Eves has halted the move to cut volunteer firefighters known as "double hatters" from fire departments across Ontario, including those in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Minister of Public Safety and Security Bob Runciman announced last week that on direction from the premier, mediator George Adams will conduct talks with fire service stakeholder groups and review the use of double hatters.

Here in Whitchurch-Stouffville, the 54 member fire department has 16 "double hatters". They are full-time firefighters on other community fire departments who, on their off time, work as volunteer or part-time firefighters for the Whitchurch-Stouffville Fire Department.

Mr. Runciman pointed out that 95 per cent of Ontario communities rely on volunteer firefighters.

Mayor Wayne Emmerson, local Fire Chief Bill Brown and the local union president all are applauding Premier Eves for appointing Mr. Adams as a mediator.

"This is great news," said International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) Local 4152 President John Winters. "Hopefully, all parties will benefit from the premier's actions. I will

be keeping an eye on the developments and will be keeping our members informed."

In late December, the future of Ontario double hatters was put into jeopardy when the Volunteer Firefighters Employment Protection Act was defeated at Queen's Park.

Bill 30 was designed to protect full-time firefighters working as double-hatters. While double hatters across Ontario wondered when they'd get the axe, mayors across the province started to ask much it would cost to replace the expelled firefighters.

"The training alone would be costly," said Mayor Wayne Emmerson. "This would be very expensive. I was especially worried about how the defeat of Bill 30 will affect the town purse. This

could have a big impact on our fire department and ultimately on our (town) budget. I am very pleased to see Mr. Eves step in and appoint a mediator. It looks like they're willing to sit down at the table and negotiate. I think they will come up with something that can work."

Traditionally, firefighters are "go-getters," said Chief Brown. "Almost all firefighters have something else on the go. Many of the full-time firefighters have part-time jobs or businesses on the side. The union doesn't have an issue with them. I believe everyone has a right to do whatever they want to do on their free time."

The IAFF union bars the double-hatter practice on the grounds that tired members could pose a safety risk. The IAFF wants communities to hire full-time firefighters. Mr. Winters agrees with the safety issue.

Fred LeBlanc, president of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, welcomes the appointment of Mr. Adams and has issued a moratorium on any new charges against members who work as double hatters during the process.

"We appreciate that the minister has initiated these discussions," said Mr. LeBlanc. "I'm certainly anxious to move forward with the process and hopefully resolve the issue."

**"**  
I believe everyone has a right to do whatever they want to do on their free time.  
**-Fire Chief Bill Brown**  
**"**

## Arts groups being surveyed

From page 1.  
approved the committee's terms of reference last week. The committee had earlier asked for \$2,000 in operating funds, which was not approved.

The committee's first priority is to poll local arts and cultural groups to identify their needs.

"We are hoping to get a han-

dle on what art and cultural groups are in town," Mr. Hill, a Stouffville resident, said. "We will be building a database of all the groups in town."

That includes all types of dance, drama, music, singing, art and other types of artistic expression. Information on any art group located in Whitchurch-

Stouffville, including the name of the group, a contact phone number, description of the group and when it meets can be e-mailed to [gwhc@rogers.com](mailto:gwhc@rogers.com). The information will be shared with the town's Leisure Services Department to help it write its Leisure Services Plan over the next few months.

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