

Big-time effort for small-town friend

Men and women wept openly late Saturday night at the Markham Fairgrounds.

What had been a raucous dance hall instantly became a prayer chapel. That '70s cover band, the funky Midlife Crisis, halted playing. The multiple bars, staffed by volunteers from the Stouffville Kinsmen, stopped pouring coolers and Canadians. A loud-mouthed heckler was quickly silenced.

Georgia and Brad Stevens took to the stage, and 1,400 people stopped partying and became very serious.

"Friends Helping Friends" read the big banners plastered around the fair's twin arts and crafts buildings. It could have read "Stouffville Being Stouffville", a friend said later. Both titles fit.

Brad, Georgia and their three kids, Connor, Kevin and Loryn, are that wonderful young family down any of your streets or the folks you know so well from the arena or the school fundraiser. They are Stouffville, with a sad difference.

Four and a half years ago, Brad was diagnosed with leukemia. He's battled it at home and in hospital, with his family and an army of relatives and friends along for the ride.

And he's done it without losing that permanent smile and those kind words he's always had for others. Same for Georgia.

You couldn't blame them if they soured. It hasn't been easy. The painful and lengthy hospital treatments. The costly time off work for both. The uncertainty. But they stayed true to themselves.

Late last fall, a group of friends told the Stevens of their plans for Saturday's fundraiser. The Stevens said "no" but the



JIM MASON OFF THE TOP

friends persisted.

All 1,500 tickets were sold at \$20 a pop with little promotion to Stouffville hockey parents, folks from the Stevens' Ironwood Crescent neighbourhood and their kids' school, St. Brigid.

Childhood friends from Scarborough, where Brad and Georgia lived before moving here 15 years ago, bought in. One friend flew in from Vancouver. Co-workers from IBM were there. So were people who only knew of Brad through his good name.

I was one of them. Brad lived a half block away for years, but we didn't meet until seven years ago when he coached our son, Ryan, in the Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association. I'm proud to have been a friend ever since, like so many others.

Georgia spoke for the family Saturday, holding back tears while all around her let them flow.

"It is said that God shows you how much he loves you by surrounding you with people to help you when you need them the most," she said. "No one knows better than Brad and I just how true this is."

She thanked the committee of friends that put the event on: Doug and Barb Todd, Rick and Heather Lee, Jim and Vicky Hulshof, Ross and Cindy Todd, Brent and Terry Stachel, Eric and Dianne Challenger, Ellen and Rick Sooley, Rod and Margaret King,

Laura and Frank Austin, Ian and Karen McLeod, Sandra and Jim McCron.

She called the evening a "magical night we will never forget".

So many agreed. They lined up to bid on silent auction items lining the walls of one of the buildings. They paid \$20 for raffle tickets. They bid thousands in a live auction on a hot tub, a laptop, a boat cruise and a weekend in Manhattan.

Auctioneer Ray Brown said he's never witnessed "such an outpouring" during his 15 years of volunteer work at the fairgrounds.

Forget Valentine's Day. On this night, you could feel love in the air at the fairgrounds.

Others called such recent local events "the Stouffville hat trick," fitting given the Stevens' busy hockey lives.

First it was the Christmas holiday benefit for cycling accident victim Luke Anderson at Latcham Hall, then last month's Game of Our Lives benefit hosted by another Stouffville cancer fighter, Leafs assistant coach Keith Acton.

Thousands of dollars were raised at this troika of events, all from one small town.

If these unfortunate personal situations happened in deeper suburbia, like Ajax or Agincourt, one doubts whether any of these three events would have been as successful.

And with thousands of new homes on the Stouffville horizon, one wonders how long we will maintain this sense of community.

This is a place where people still care deeply about their neighbours.

Thankfully.

Jim Mason is managing editor of the Stouffville Sun.

STOUFFVILLE SAYS

BY HANNELORE VOLPE

"How important do you think standardized EQAO results are in rating a school's performance?"



TRINA WEEKS

"I would think it is somewhat misleading. It does not encompass everything that goes on in school life. But the testing still has an important role in assessing educational standards."



BOB LOTT

"It is very unfair to the children because some teachers take it more seriously than others. They are at a disadvantage if the staff is not preparing them. The smaller schools where they don't have the specialty staff to prepare the kids are also at a disadvantage."



RUTH SMITH

"I don't think it is a bad idea to have a snapshot of how education is working across the province. I think my daughter is stressed when she takes these tests, but that is true of any exam."



MAME D'ARCY

"I do look at the results because my child may be changing schools. Other than comments from other parents, I don't have anything else to go on. I saved the test results and studied them."



CALVIN WEEKS

"I look at other factors which have not been encouraging. I believe we need more discipline and spirituality in schools. My four-year-old son is home schooled. If he goes to school, I will look at private schools, then Christian and Catholic schools and public schools last."

The caring voice of the Stouffville Cemetery

There's nothing surer than death and taxes. The latter, I can handle, at least the first installment.

The former, I'm not so sure. Or wasn't so sure. For I (or should I say we), entered year 2002 ashamedly unprepared. We hadn't yet selected a site to serve as a final resting place.

Sure, we'd talked about it. Truth is, we'd discussed the matter so often, both had become weary. However, with the advent of three score years and 13, the time seemed right to translate words into actions.

An appointment was arranged with town licensing officer Colleen Clarke, a lady whose multi-purpose roll includes secretary of the Stouffville cemetery board.

Admittedly, I felt somewhat intimidated discussing something so personal with someone I didn't really know.

But my nervousness quickly disappeared. For this compassionate mother of two put herself in our shoes, walking a path of insight and understanding.

So much so, we analyzed issues of intimacy we'd possibly withhold from our family. On leaving, she undoubtedly knew us better than we knew ourselves. But we felt better for it.

Strange isn't it how something so certain, so important, so definite as death, is something we often delay discussing. Even worse, we prefer delaying decisions. Until often too late.

"There's so little time," Colleen agrees, "and so much to do." Because of this, pre-arranged funerals are becoming increasingly popular, she says.

"It's unfair to place such responsibilities on the shoulders of next-of-kin," Colleen claims. She's oh-so-right.



JIM THOMAS

ROAMING AROUND

For us, it came down to two choices, burial or cremation. We selected the former, old-fashioned, I guess. More and more people, it seems, are choosing the latter. To each his own.

In life so in death, we're not spendthrifts. Still we chose two plots, side by side rather than above and below. Cost of the horizontal site was \$1,470.00 plus \$240 for four corner markers. The vertical placement would have decreased the expense by half, plus four corner stones. Again, to each his own.

These are basic. However, the cemetery board, comprising Eric Button, Fay Minton, Brad Schmale, Murray Wagg, Colleen Clarke, secretary, mayor Wayne Emmerson and Clerk Michele Kennedy, ex-officio, have more on their plates, much more. For example:

- Did you know that:
- The cemetery board comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services.
- There are approximately 400 cemetery plots still available.
- Whitchurch-Stouffville has 18 cemeteries, but burials are conducted at only seven.
- Now, for a first time the Stouffville cemetery permits winter burials.
- Winter burials were approved by the board following a request from the Stouffville

Ministerial Association.

- Cemetery caretaking is handled by private contract.
- Imitation flowers are allowed, but gravesite shrubs are frowned upon.
- Where a burial is handled through social services, the board selects the site.
- The storage vault for ashes is called a columbarium.
- There are no restrictions as to where ashes may be dispersed.
- Non-resident burials are accommodated at no extra cost.
- Backyard burials are not permitted.
- Farm gravesites are no longer allowed.
- Vertical grave markers are available through the Stouffville Monument Works with the cost averaging \$3,500. Flat stones are \$700 and pillow stones \$900. Delivery and installation take about eight weeks.
- Stouffville's cemetery decoration day is the third Sunday in June.
- Daily cemetery visitation hours extend from 8 a.m. to sundown.
- Dogs are not allowed.
- A charge of loitering carries a maximum \$1,000 fine.

All this information and more Colleen has at her fingertips. Whitchurch-Stouffville is indeed fortunate.

"I love what I do," she says.

We loved what she did for us: Displaying compassion, kindness, patience and understanding. Colleen transformed an expected agonizing ordeal into a satisfying experience.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 50 years.