

OPINION

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Editorial

No common sense on liability issue

Municipal governments don't make a move these days without taking potential liability into account. Yet it seems decisions are increasingly being made on the wrong side of the coin.

Richmond Hill councillors voted this week not to reinstate lifeguards at Sunset Beach, a popular spot for residents and visitors on Lake Wilcox.

During this year's budget discussions, lifeguard services were cancelled in response to a recommendation from the town's risk management staff, who said the presence of lifeguards actually increased the town's liability exposure.

If a drowning occurred, it seems the town would have a better chance in court if there was no one there to save the victim.

"The town's decision not to supervise the beach would be a defensible position in terms of liability," parks commissioner Lynton Friedberg said in a report.

The reality, however, is the town could find itself liable, regardless of how it chooses to staff the beach. If someone drowned, a court may find other safety devices at beach, including a buoyline and lifesaving stations, simply aren't enough to protect bathers.

The fact the beach is a busy spot used by swimmers of all abilities should have been the prime consideration during discussions, not liability.

Yet for municipalities, it is increasingly becoming the sole motivator in many decisions.

Not long ago, school and municipal playgrounds throughout the region were dismantled over liability concerns.

Earlier this month, Richmond Hill councillors voted to dismantle the town's 26 outdoor drinking fountains. While the exorbitant cost to bring the fountains up to code was the prime motivator, once again, fears of potential liability played a role in the discussions.

It's time for municipalities to exercise a little more common sense.

In citing liability exposure, councillors may be protecting town coffers, but at what cost?

In this case, it would be better to downplay concerns over a potential lawsuit in favour of staffing a busy local park with properly trained lifesaving personnel. The estimated cost of doing so for the rest of the summer would be \$17,400 — a small price to pay.

It's important for governments at all levels to reduce their liability. But the guiding principle of a liability strategy must be to make municipal parks and facilities as safe as possible.



Off The Top

with Hannelore Volpe

Testosterone tales

Just how much testosterone is in Whitchurch-Stouffville?

Apparently plenty, if this summer and fall are any indication.

First there were Elvises all over Main Street, then the lumberjack show at the Strawberry Festival and now... lawnmower races?

There's nothing wrong with men of many ages in sequin-covered bell bottoms, singing "hunka, hunka burnin' love." Fortunately, the Elvises are all in town at the same time. Think of what it would be like if some of them forgot to go home and popped up randomly on Main Street, belting out Jailhouse Rock? After a few weeks, local merchants would have to scramble to keep up their stocks of white scarves and sequins.

The lumberjack show, which was a first for the Strawberry Festival, let men show what real men are like.

Take building a fire from a log, for instance. Two teams of guys competed against each other to chop a log into kindling, arrange the wood pieces and chips and then blow on the fire to make it catch.

I began wondering how long they'd been in the woods before coming here, when two lumberjacks stationed themselves on opposite sides of the fire and tried to dodge the ever-larger flames blowing in their faces.

If that isn't enough, the annual Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum classic car show is Sunday, Aug. 10.

Some of the vehicles date back to the early years of the last century. The men, whose pride and joy they are, hover to talk with visitors while wielding rags to do battle with stray dust.

If we could transfer that cleaning energy into our homes, we'd all need to wear sunglasses whenever we entered the kitchen.

And in the "I've heard it all" category, lawnmower races are coming to Stouffville Sept. 27.

I wonder how many men are having sleepless nights already, thinking of how they'll soup up the old John Deere.

Since I'm making the wild assumption most entrants will be male, it makes me wonder how things will go. After all, we are dealing with a gender not noted for asking directions.

Does that mean some could end up in, say, Godwood, and pick up a few mowing jobs before finding their way back?

I suppose not. Organizers are making sure people remove the mower blades before showing up for competitions.

Hannelore Volpe is a reporter at the *Stouffville Sun-Tribune*. Editor Jim Mason is on vacation.

Letters to the Editor

The Stouffville Sun-Tribune welcomes your letters.

All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The Stouffville Sun-Tribune reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space.

Write: Letters to the Editor, 34 Civic Ave., P.O. Box 154, Stouffville, L4A 7Z5, e-mail jmason@ymg.com

Stouffville man unsuspecting victim of debit card thieves

Re: *Skimming victims sought by police, July 12.*

Last Saturday night my 25-year-old son stopped at the drive-through of the TD Canada Trust to remove money from his account.

Then he drove to the Petro Canada gas station at Hwy. 48 and Stouffville Road before heading downtown to a club.

He also used a TD Canada Trust machine Sunday night at a movie theatre.

On Monday morning, I received a call from TD Loss Prevention wanting to speak with my son.

I said he was at work and asked if there was a problem.

The caller gave no explanation, but asked me to pass on his phone number and for my son to have his account number ready.

Having read the *Sun-Tribune* article about the debit card skimming victim, I phoned my son at work and told him to check out the phone number first.

I thought Loss Prevention might be a scam.

But we discovered thieves somehow managed to obtain my son's card and PIN numbers.

They made a fake deposit of \$2,400 into his

account.

As we later found out, everyone's daily withdrawal limit is \$1,200, which the thieves knew.

On Sunday just before midnight, they withdrew \$1,200. The rest was taken 7 a.m. Monday.

It was only when the bank opened the deposit envelope and found it empty that the investigation started.

On Monday afternoon, my son had to leave work early to help in the investigation, and receive a new card and PIN.

His account was frozen for five days during the inquiry.

There are two victims here, my son and the bank.

The bank is the main victim, as my son didn't have to pay the loss.

But this incident makes it clear we need to be alert at all times when using bank cards.

CHERYL FEDRIGO
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