

# Drivers stuck in gridlock

**BLACKOUT**  
2003

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Staff Writer

He was all in black, standing in the middle of Steeles Avenue and waving cars through between drags on his cigarette.

Giving every indication he knew what he was doing, the man directed motorists and pedestrians at the intersection at Warden Avenue.

Keeping it up as the sun sank, he was one of many local heroes who decided to help others reach home during the Rush Hour from Hell.

One kept traffic flowing at Warden and Denison Street. Others did the same for the major streets along Steeles, water bottles at their feet.

Still, people in the blackouts early hours faced what looked like an impossible commute home.

At 5:40 p.m., human resources consultant Frank Wong prepared to turn his Honda Civic into the stationary eastbound traffic on 14th Avenue.

"We've been waiting here for a half-hour already," said Jasmine Wong, a backseat passenger.

Two insurance agency employees, Tara Pollard and Kathy Poschar, took off their shoes and sat on the grass. They waited for someone from their office to find a rotary phone, something they would need to receive the many accident calls they knew were coming.

"And then we'll be here all night," Ms Poschar predicted.

"A dental laboratory worker in a stained white smock reclined on a lawn nearby, listening to a transistor radio. He said he'd make it home the same way as everyone else: "Take the car and go slowly."

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*one of those things you*

*never expect to happen.*

Scott Murden, a graphic artist from Mount Albert, sat at the corner of Birchmount Road. He waited with his cigarettes and cell phone and remembered his car had little gas left in it.

"I was on empty before I even got to work. It's one of those things you never expect to happen," he said.

David, a business owner who

didn't want to give his last name, stood with his arms folded on the sidewalk and checked the traffic, having advised his staff to remain at work, where they might be cooler than in their homes.

He said he had heard about the computer virus called Blaster two days before and thought of it when the lights went out.

"At the beginning I thought that might be the cause."

Waiting for traffic to lighten up so he could reach his home in North York, Chris Hunter sat in front of three empty cans and an untouched sausage roll in a 14th Avenue doughnut shop, which was doing a brisk business.

"It would be nice, if it was close, you could walk," he said.

As gaps in traffic developed, some drivers grew frustrated at intersections. A man driving a Ford Explorer honked, clapped his hands and hollered at other motorists because he could not turn from 14th Avenue onto Alden Road. "Just f---ing move already!" he shouted.

Cars stood stranded in the intersection with other cars moving between them. As a westbound Civic lurched to a stop to avoid a collision, an exasperated passenger raised her hand. "What's going on here?" she said.

# 'Use common sense,' mayor asks residents

From page 1.

around the municipality, making sure no one is watering their lawns or washing their cars," Mayor Emmerson said.

"(When) the power does come on, I'm asking people to use common sense and only use what they absolutely have to. So far, the residents of Whitchurch-Stouffville have been calm and polite. It's good," he said.

Sun-Tribune columnist Jim Thomas was thanked regularly for directing traffic at Main and Mill streets in Stouffville Thursday. Motorists handed him bottled water and canned pop, which he had stacked next to the street.

Ice in an arena had a life expectancy of about 18 hours. With no backup, things don't look good for the ice at the Stouffville Arena, said Jeff Lamb, building manager.

A training camp session for the Stouffville Spirit junior A hockey team was cancelled Thursday night, affecting 50 youths.

The Daisy Patch at Musselman's Lake was doing a brisk ice cream business Thursday night and early yesterday morning. For variety store owner Bonnie Jackson, it was a two-edged sword: Every time she opened the freezer door, the cold escaped and ice

cream grew softer.

"I had \$1,000 worth of ice cream delivered just before the power went out," Mrs. Jackson said. "I made arrangements for generators to come in. I hope they get here on time or I'm going to have quite a melt."

Even though the beer taps and air conditioners at Stouffville's Emerald Isle were out of commission, that didn't keep the regulars away.

"Nothing worked. Not even the cash register," owner Pauline Ashmore said. "I couldn't even buy batteries for my lanterns. No stores were open, but the customers came anyway."

With \$6,000 worth of meat in the freezer, an extended power failure hurts, said Lee Farley, manager of the Fickle Pickle, a Main Street restaurant. And, I had to turn a lot of people away. We also sent staff home. This is difficult," said Ms Farley.

Gindi Ross of Lakeshore Road treated the power outage as a welcome release from the usual hustle and bustle. The GO train ride from Toronto was uneventful Thursday night.

"I got home, the kids were quiet. There were no video games and no loud music. It was wonderful. I walked over to the lake and got an ice cream cone. Yes, it's soft but who cares. Life is good," Ms Ross said.

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