

Baby, it could be rough at festival competition

What are your plans for the weekend? For cottage lovers, the getaway urge may be irresistible. Nothing, absolutely nothing can allay the lure of the northland. So be it, if that's your choice.

For me, a sequestered homebody, the place to be is Stouffville. Our Strawberry Festival, now in its 20th year, offers something for every age. You name it, we have it. This is the place to be Thursday through Sunday.

So what am I doing? I thought you'd never ask. To set the record straight, I won't be guessing weights and ages. A two-year sabbatical has tarnished my skills. Instead, I hope to arrange some practice stunts during the off-season and return to the clock tower site in 2005. That is, if Don Burd's Toledo is still working.

Honestly though, my schedule's too full to accommodate this extra-curricular chore. And while I'm not complaining, I detest biting off more than I can chew.

In addition to doing my Jerry Howarth routine down at the ball park, I've promised to assist behind the counter at the Presbyterian booth.

Later, I hope to renew acquaintances with ex-student friends attending the Stouffville Secondary reunion Saturday night. That should make for a full day and evening.

But wait, there's more. I'm also master of ceremonies at the baby show Saturday morning. This event's scheduled for 10:30 a.m. on the mobile stage near the picnic shelter in the park. The sponsor is Tim Hortons, working in close co-operation with Stouffville's Moms and Tots group.

While the festival program describes the event as a contest, I dislike the word, particularly when it relates to children. We all know, in a mother's eyes at least, each is a winner. And no ribbon, be it red, blue or white, is going convince a proud parent otherwise. So a show it is, not a competition. Yes, I could have been a judge. Margaret King gave me that option.

"I was wondering if you'd be so kind as to help us out," Margaret asked, during a mid-morning coffee break last week. "I know, in the past, you've been wary of judging, but I thought perhaps you might consider MC-ing the show."

My initial response was "no." However, with Margaret's beseeching reflection still mirrored in my coffee cup, I reconsidered.

"Judging's out," I responded, "but a master of ceremonies, I think I can handle that."

"I know you can," she replied reassuringly, "let's discuss the details later."

What if a wee one needs an on-stage diaper change and the mother asks me to do it?

Margaret obviously has more confidence in me than I have in myself. My knees have been knocking ever since.

My mind keeps conjuring up all kinds of terrible things, like: What if a baby begins crying uncontrollably and the distraught mother hands her over to me?

What if a wee one needs an on-stage diaper change and the mother asks me to do it? What do I do?

What if the same babe suddenly burps all over my Canada Eh! shirt? What if 50 irate mothers suddenly bombard the stage with bottles? What do I do?

What if I mistakenly announce the grand champion as Henry instead of Henrietta? What do I do?

Such possibilities have me tossing and turning every night. What if, what if, I keep mumbling in my sleep.

"Stop worrying," my wife replies unsympathetically. "Everything will be fine."

Fine for her, maybe. She'll be far removed from physical and mental mayhem. I'll be alone to fend for myself.

Admittedly, previous baby shows have gone off without a whimper. Stouffville moms (and dads) have been very understanding, even to setting aside personal egos and congratulating the winner.

On the surface, at least, there's been no sign of malice or resentment. All have been on their best behaviour.


Regardless, forearmed is to be forewarned. If Margaret insists on dispensing free doughnuts to the mothers of also-rans, I'll recommend the would-be missiles not be frozen.

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



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