

## 'Tis the Season to TREEcycle

The holidays may be over but there is still one more thing to give...your holiday tree!

During the week of **January 10-14**, place your holiday tree at the curb on your regularly scheduled waste collection day for pickup.

We will recycle your tree into compost for Town of Markham parks.

Please make sure all decorations and tree stands are removed from the tree and do not cover it in plastic.

Remember, trees must be at the curb by 7:00 a.m. on your regular waste collection day for pickup.

905-415-7535 [www.markham.ca](http://www.markham.ca)



## Multi-faith service to honour victims

A multi-faith service to honour victims of the tsunami disaster will be held Sunday in the Markham council chambers at 2 p.m.

"Our deepest sympathy is extended to those in our community who have lost a loved one," Mayor Don Cousens said. "Markham has pledged \$2,500 to the relief effort and will continue to support this effort in the days and weeks ahead."

The town is hosting the service with the Rapid Reaction Initiative, a recently formed group of community agencies.

Faiths participating in the service include Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish and Muslim. The town is flying flags at half-mast until the end of tomorrow.

York Regional Police Chief Armand La Barge is encouraging residents to attend the service.

"It's an opportunity for the community to come together in support of the many people in our region who have lost loved ones," the chief said.

"Markham council is holding this service to show support for the families of many diverse cultures and communities who are affected by this disaster," Councillor Khalid Usman said.

Markham Mayor Cousens noted, "Through partnerships and the gen-



**DON COUSENS:** Diverse community aiding residents in more than 11 countries, Markham mayor says.

erosity and prayers of our citizens who help make Markham such a diverse community, we are coming together to assist residents in more than 11 countries affected."

The council chamber is in the Markham Civic Centre at 101 Town Centre Blvd., in the Hwy. 7 and Warden Avenue area.

-Joan Ransberry

## Muslims answer call

BY MIKE ADLER  
Staff Writer

Relief money is flowing to local mosques as Muslims react to the South Asian disaster by giving.

"We look at it as a test of our faith and our compassion," Zafar Bangash, president of the Islamic Society of York Region, said Thursday. "We must not fail in that."

Though the devastation is terrible and Muslims cannot explain why so many innocent people have perished or are suffering, the local community has faith in God's plan and "it's incumbent on us to open our hearts and wallets and do the utmost to help", the Markham publisher said.

Many are answering the call at Sunni mosques across Greater Toronto, which are trying to raise \$1 million.

"It's really a trauma for everybody. Everybody wants to help," said Akbar Warsi, a Markham resident helping to run the campaign from the Islamic Foundation of Toronto mosque in Scarborough, which raised \$40,000 in one hour Friday.

### DONATIONS AT BANQUETS

Both the Nugget Avenue mosque and the Islamic Society of York Region mosque on Stouffville Road in Whitchurch-Stouffville will hold fundraising dinners Sunday, expecting donations of at least \$50 a plate.

GTA Muslims are organizing relief camps and sending medical teams to disaster areas in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country.

They eventually hope to build housing and orphanages in both countries, while local offices watch how the contributions are spent.

"We want to keep full control of the funds," Mr. Warsi explained.

While the federal government's response is not as good as it could be, Canadians "have been incredibly generous" in the face of the disaster, Mr. Bangash said.

Khalid Usman, a Markham councillor arranging a municipal campaign in the town with a citizens group called Rapid Reaction Initiative, said the generosity of residents makes him feel proud to be Canadian.

People are helping victims of the tsunami "as if it has happened to us. That's the spirit that's around now", he said.

## Tamils 'wrong to say aid blocked'

While many in York Region's Tamil community warned areas of Sri Lanka might not receive aid due to civil conflict between Tamils and the island's Sinhalese-led government, other residents dismissed these charges as propaganda.

Some Tamil groups are "trying to gain political advantage" from the disaster, said Sanath Kodikara of Markham, arguing the tsunami did not discriminate among ethnic groups and the Sri Lankan government won't either.

"This is all about humanity," added Mr. Kodikara, who lost two relatives in his village near the west coast town of Galle but learned his mother and brother escaped the waves.

"They managed to run to the highest point in the village, which was the temple."

"There was not one iota of discrimination in the relief effort," added a statement this week from the Sri Lanka United National Association of Canada, which complained Canadian Tamils "painted a false picture" by claiming the disaster hurt Sri Lanka's Tamil northeast most. "Whilst the north and east was ravaged by the tsunami tidal wave, the densely populated south and southwest was equally affected, with a larger number becoming displaced," honorary president Mahinda Gunasekera said.

-Mike Adler

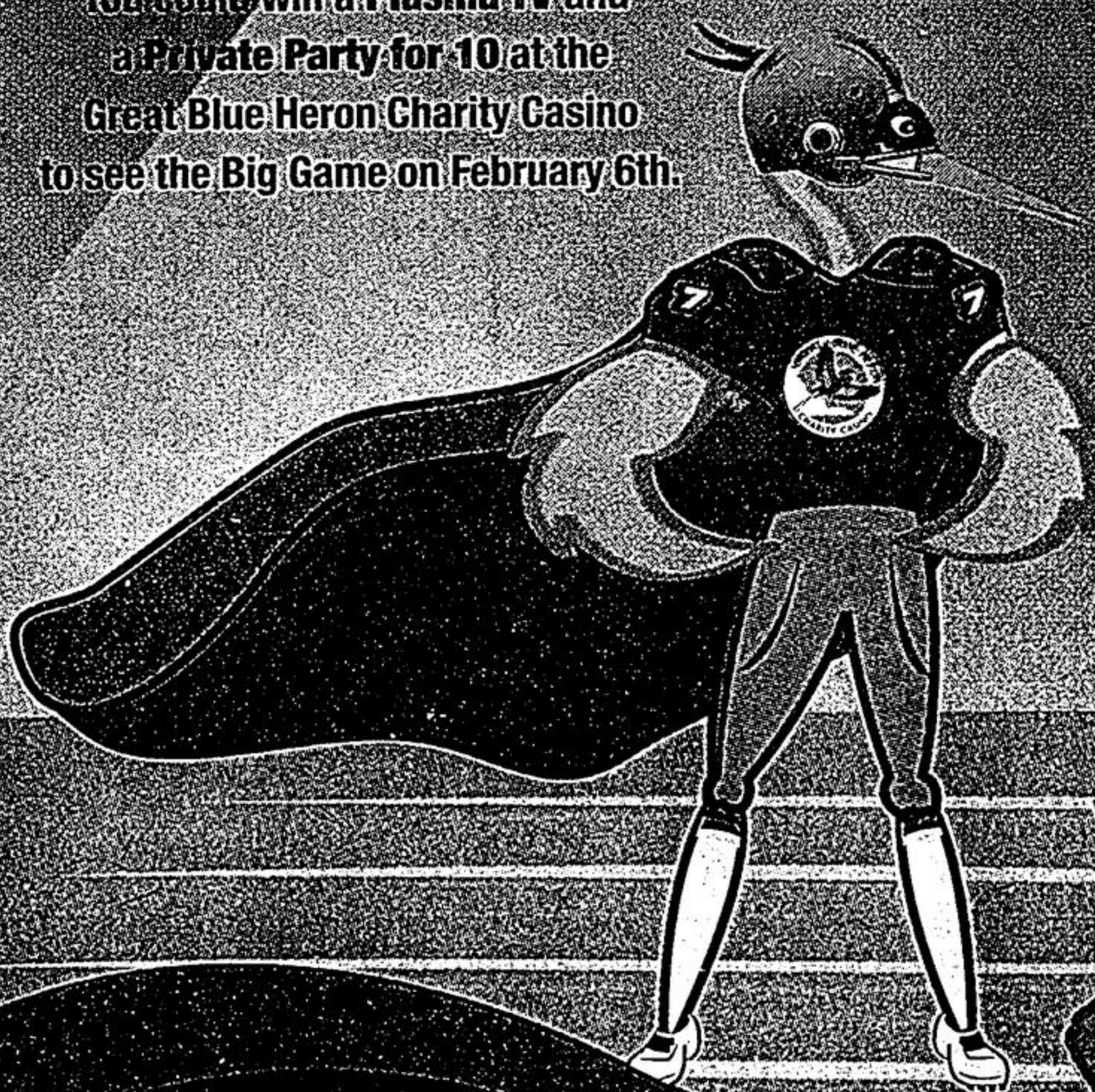
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