

Stouffville Says

By Hannelore Volpe

What event are you looking forward to most in Whitchurch-Stouffville?

— Asked at Sobeyes

Audrey CHRISTIE



I am looking forward to special programs at the library. I did a computer program last year and I am interested in the book discussion group.

Denise HUME



I am looking forward to having my baby in June and to the Strawberry Festival. We go strawberry picking and I take pictures for scrapbooking.

Rod GIBSON



I am looking forward to more snow because I have a snow plowing business.

Paul JEFFREY



I like the Strawberry Festival and seeing familiar faces along Main Street. It's around the time of my birthday so it's a happy time. I look forward to the fireworks.



STAFF PHOTO/BILL ROBERTS

Prime time in the woods

Fred Sheehy offers visitors information on modern day maple syrup production inside the sugar shack during the Enbridge Sugarbush Bruce's Mill Maple Syrup Festival. Hours of operation are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. all this week and next week. Bruce's Mill is on Stouffville Road between Kennedy Road and Warden Avenue.

Horse farmers like tax changes

BY ROY GREEN AND JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writers

Horse farm owners who were facing huge tax hikes are breathing sighs of relief this week, following the province's reversal of its tax assessment formula.

After a month of talks between the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation and equestrian representatives, MPAC backed off its plans to change the classification of hundreds of horse farms from "farm" or "residential" to "commercial".

As many as 1,400 York Region farms with horse-related activities were facing reassessments that could multiply their taxes as much as 13 times.

Seven establishments had already been hit with hikes ranging from \$800 to more than \$10,000, according to Ed Hankins, the region's director of policy, risk and treasury.

Many owners of properties where boarding, riding lessons or trail rides are offered said the increases would force them out of business and one, Shirley Hetherington of Mount Albert, said applying a commercial rate to her 75-acre farm in Mount Albert would

boost her tax bill from \$15,000 to \$100,000.

But the new formula is designed to treat equestrian facilities fairly, according to Finance Minister Greg Sorbara, who ordered MPAC to meet with industry officials following a wave of complaints from owners and equestrian associations.

"The new criteria represents an appropriate balance between fair treatment for horse farm owners and consistency with other types of property," Mr. Sorbara said.

York Region is home to 1,365 horse farms and more than 17,000 horses.

"The news will have significant impact on the horse industry in the province. It is particularly important to York Region, which is known as the horse capital of Canada," Marcia Barrett, executive director of the Ontario Equestrian Federation, said.

The revisions are fair to all farm owners and recognize the equestrian industry involves different land uses, she said.

Under the new formula, only activities commercial in nature will be treated as commercial property — tack shops, premises used to sell equestrian supplies or clothing, restaurants, commercial

racetracks and slots, grandstands and banquet halls.

Breeding, boarding, training, selling and raising horses will be assessed as farm or residential, while a new classification — rural recreational — will be applied to land used exclusively for riding lessons, trail rides or riding camps.

MPAC already uses a similar category, at the same rate as residential taxes, for golf courses and ski hills, according to Leslie Brooks, the Kitchener horse farmer who led the battle against MPAC's commercial assessments.

"Basically, we will be back to what we were," Ms Brooks said. "All horse maintenance will be farm or residential, depending upon their situation. For some, it will even be better than before."

The revised assessment criteria will be retroactive to Jan. 1, 2004 and Ms Brooks said she is continuing to work with MPAC to address reassessments going back to 2002-03.

The changes are a huge relief to thousands of horse farm owners, Ontario Equestrian Federation president Allan Ehrlick said. "We are delighted to see that equestrian facilities will now be assessed in a fair and equitable manner."

Briefly

Man entered apartment

York Regional Police are looking for a man who entered a ground-level apartment in Stouffville uninvited through an unlocked patio door last week.

At approximately 2:30 a.m. March 6, a Winlane Drive resident awoke to find a man at the end of her bed.

She screamed, waking up her adult daughter, who told the man to get out. The man complied immediately and neither woman was touched or threatened.

The woman believes the man may have been visiting someone else in her building as she has seen him before.

Police would like to talk to the man, who is described as a white male, five-feet two-inches tall, 140 pounds, in his mid-30s, with a thin build and dirty blonde hair.

Anyone with information is asked to contact police at 1-866-876-5423, ext. 7541, Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS or leave an anonymous tip online at www.crimestoppersyr.ca.

Egg-citing day for children

Good timing means Whitchurch-Stouffville children can take part in Easter egg hunts in Ballantrae and Stouffville.

The Ballantrae Easter egg hunt, hosted by the Ballantrae Sparks, Brownies and Girl Guides, runs from 10 to 11 a.m. March 26.

The downtown Stouffville event begins at 1 p.m. at the Stouffville Train Station and continues until 3 p.m.

Thousands of foil-covered chocolate eggs will be hidden throughout Felcher Park in Ballantrae. During the hunt, Guides will have cookies on sale at \$4 per box. Admission is free, but donations to the Whitchurch-Stouffville Food Bank are welcome.

On Stouffville's Main Street, the Business Improvement Area's Easter egg hunt begins at the Stouffville Train Station.

Children, accompanied by adults, can receive Easter treats from participating Main Street merchants.

Quoteworthy

'I don't even have a basketball net'

Patrick Clause, three-time free throw champion. See story on page 20.

Contacting Us

Have a news tip? Please:

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