



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Real estate agent Don LaCroix spends nearly \$250 a week on gas for his Ford Expedition but says he can't do his job in a smaller, more fuel efficient vehicle.

Not everyone changing ways for rising fuel costs

BY PATRICK MANGION
Staff Writer

Don LaCroix's Ford Expedition SUV is a pig on gas.

With prices at the pump across the Greater Toronto Area holding steady at 80 cents after creeping close the \$1 mark last week, Mr. LaCroix spends nearly \$250 a week on fillups.

You might think that would be all the motivation the real estate agent — who lives in Georgina, works from Newmarket and drives to properties all over the region — would need to trade in his gas guzzler for a more economical form of transportation.

But he has no plans to do so.

"I can't be driving around in a four cylinder (vehicle), piling in a bunch of people. It's the cost of doing business," Mr. LaCroix said.

Like many drivers in commuter-dependent York Region, he isn't compensated for travel expenses and that has wide-ranging implications, not just for the real estate industry but business altogether, Mr. LaCroix said.

"Gas prices are escalating and there's no trend that's going to stop. People are going to take a closer look at what they're doing," he said.

Around this time last year, Canadian consumers were shocked as gas prices exceeded 70 cents. As the reality of \$1-a-litre gasoline sets in at other major Canadian centres, many local workers and business owners said they are changing their ways.

Daniel Gauthier just started his own computer support business out of his Markham home. A significant portion of his day is spent driving to business

and home calls in a vehicle emblazoned with his TwinBytes logo.

"I'm more reluctant to take a half hour job down in Toronto," Mr. Gauthier said in reaction to gas prices.

Similarly, Iggy Natoli said cold calling on site for new business, an important part of his work for 20 years, may be falling by the wayside due to gas prices.

"It forces you to organize your time better. If I go out on a call, there's got to be a good chance for a sale," said Mr. Natoli, who operates an air purification business in Unionville.

While the self-employed may grudgingly accept their plight, those who depend on mileage reimbursement from their employer watch prices rise with anxiety.

Jo-Anne Applebaum works in the financial services industry for one of York's largest employers.

Like many others, she is assigned a coverage area and receives a monthly car allowance in accordance with those responsibilities.

And while \$850 may sound like a lot, when you consider all the cost associated with operating a vehicle month-to-month, all of a sudden it may not be the bargain it once seemed, she said.

"I'm breaking even now, but it's going to be trouble when (gas prices) get up to a dollar plus," said Ms Applebaum, adding she travels about 22,000 kilometres a year on business.

Ultimately, her company sets her compensation, so there's no sense making a stink over automobile costs, she said.

"Let's put it this way. I'm not about to jeopardize my job over it."

BUSINESS DIGEST

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Reporters will record the experiences and use them in our State of Public Transit series that runs next month.

Please e-mail editor Tracy Kibble at tkibble@yrng.com or fax her at 905-853-5379 by April 22 if you are interested.

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