

Leave car at home, take bus, bicycle: Challenge

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

A drive is on to get you out of your car.

A campaign, designed to have motorists choose a different way to get to and from work, kicked off in the Markham and Richmond Hill business community Tuesday.

The Smart Commute 404-7 Transportation Management Association joined forces with the Markham Board of Trade and the Richmond Hill

Chamber of Commerce to encourage local businesses to register for the 2005 National Commuter Challenge, which runs from June 5 to 11.

Invitations to join the campaign have also been sent to more than 150 businesses in the Markham and Richmond Hill area. In particular, business owners are being reminded that June 8 is Clean Air Day.

The nation-wide program invites participants to use public transit, car pool,

walk, cycle or telework.

"During the week, motorists will be encouraged to get out of their cars, ride a bike, take a bus, share a ride with a friend or work from home," Richmond Hill Chamber CEO Leslie Walker said. "It will help the environment and help business. Let's see if we can make a difference."

Traffic congestion is the "biggest business problem" in this area, Board of Trade president Keith Bray told a

gathering on the 16th-floor roof-top of the Radisson Hotel Toronto-Markham at East Valhalla Drive and Hwy. 7. The group got a bird's-eye view of the slow-moving traffic on Hwy. 7.

George Flint, a Smart Commute 404-7 coordinator, stressed that now is the time for business leaders to act. "They have to get involved and see what they can do to make a change," Mr. Flint said. "The environment depends on it."

Philip Gunn, a

spokesperson for GWL Realty Advisors, issued a challenge to other businesses in the area to join the campaign.

"We're promoting clean air and clean driving," Mr. Gunn said. "It's an opportunity for businesses, particularly those along the Hwy. 7 corridor, to pitch in and make a difference."

In 2004, more than 60,000 participants took part in the national challenge in Vancouver, Calgary, Hamilton and Ottawa.

This marks the first year that the challenge has been taken up in Markham and Richmond Hill. Local companies are being encouraged to engage in this friendly competition.

There is no prize connected to the challenge. Municipalities and business are, however, recognized for their involvement.

The challenge was developed to "recognize, reward and thank" individuals and businesses that support environmentally

healthy community options, said Lorenzo Mele, Markham's transportation demand management coordinator. "We encourage other commuters to make healthy choices and to emphasize the personal, social and environmental benefits of healthy commuting," he added.

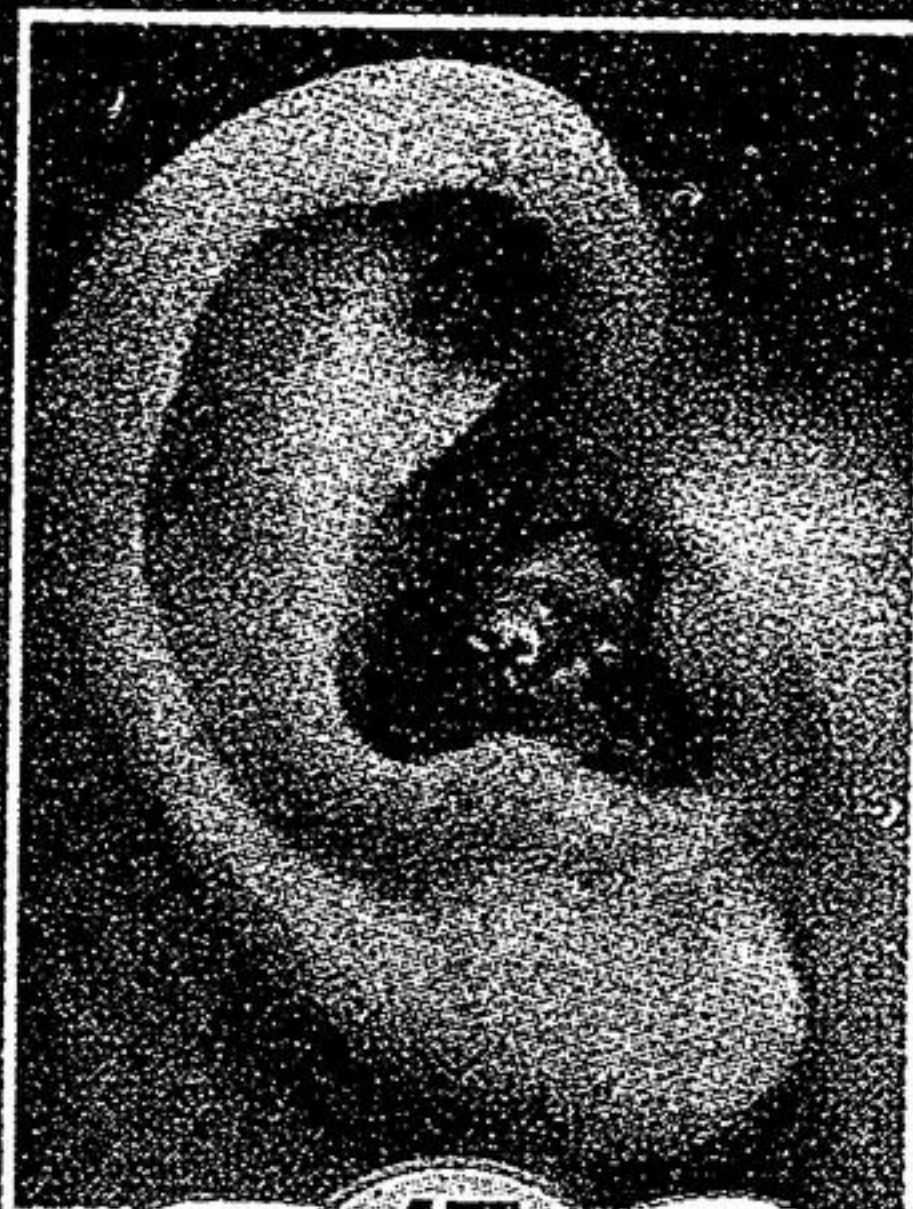
Local businesses recognize traffic in the 404-7 corridor as a problem, Mr. Bray said.

"The commuter challenge gives each of us a chance to take some responsibility for solutions to congestion and to make a difference," he said.

Participants can register online. Challengers can sign up their companies, departments and organizations or as individuals.

Once registered, participants are encouraged to log their results online daily.

To register for the challenge, visit <http://www.smartcommute404-7.ca> through the Commuter Challenge logo or call 905-477-7000, ext. 4000.



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ANNOUNCEMENT



I am pleased to announce the following appointment as part of the continued growth of our Events Group for the York Region Newspaper Group:

Bonnie Rondeau - YRNG Events Manager.

Bonnie has been in the publishing industry for more than 25 years. During the past 4 years with YRNG, she has worked as a senior sales representative in our Events Group and with our Directories. Bonnie has also been a sales representative at the Stouffville Sun-Tribune and on our special projects. She previously was an ad rep at the Uxbridge Tribune (Times-Journal) working in classified and real estate. Bonnie held positions at Rogers working for Flare Magazine, The Financial Post and MACLEAN'S as well as a classified sales person at The Toronto Star.

Bonnie's mandate for YRNG is to continue to develop and grow our events and shows in partnership with our advertisers and to the benefit and enjoyment of our readers!

Gord Paolucci
Director of Advertising
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