

OPINION

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Act of racial vandalism won't deter town

Re: Cultural groups condemn vandalism: Blacks, Chinese stoned on homes vehicles, July 9.

I would like all our residents to know the town recognized our cultural diversity as one of our greatest assets and we have worked diligently with various cultural groups, York Regional Police and the boards of education to improve relationships in the community.

One of the initiatives put in place by the town to promote mutual understanding and respect is the Markham race relations committee.

The committee is comprised of residents from various ethnic backgrounds and councillors who meet on a regular basis to discuss incidents like this and investigate ways the town can foster a greater understanding and harmony amongst the diverse cultural groups that make up our community.

In addition, the town is an eager participant in the York Region Character Community initiative.

This program promotes the importance of demonstrating and fostering good character.

Since launching this initiative four years ago, we have come a long way in promoting good character in schools, municipalities, businesses, families and wherever the message will travel.

Some of the character attributes

encouraged are respect, compassion, inclusiveness, responsibility, integrity and fairness.

We feel this is an isolated case and York police are committed to bringing those responsible to justice. The town has taken many positive steps to improve relationships within our community and we will not be deterred by this random act of vandalism.

You can be assured the town takes pride in its diversity and will continue to act in a responsible manner to strengthen our community.

DON COUSENS
MAYOR
MARKHAM

Rough ride for passengers

Re: Air France jet accident at Pearson airport.

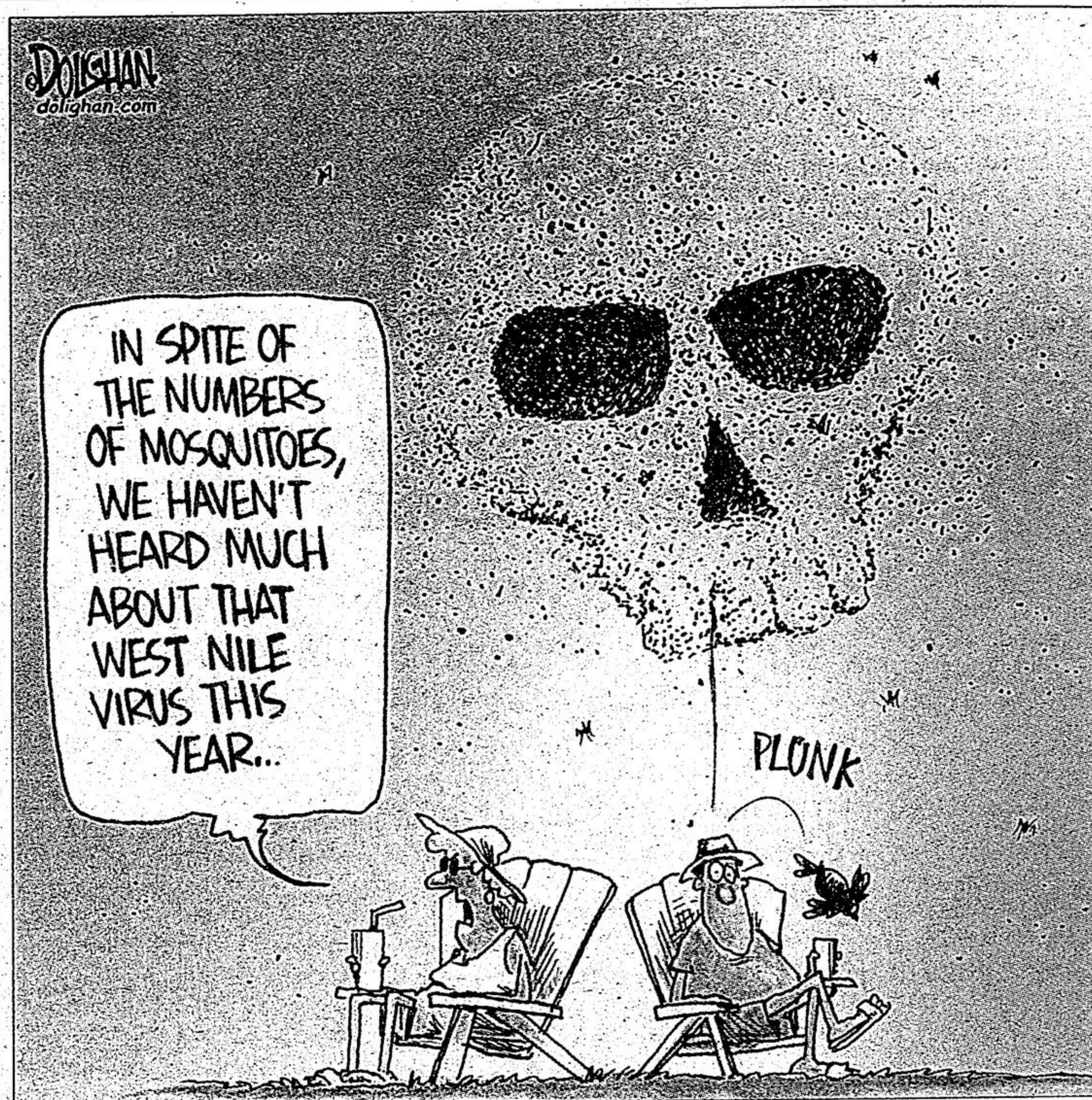
It was extremely sad to read what the Air France passengers went through.

The excited tourists anticipating great holidays, the tired vacationers returning home, the business people on work trips and all other passengers did not deserve to experience such a terrible incident.

I hope those injured will make swift recoveries.

We can only imagine what those affected by the incident are going through right now.

NADIA WARSI
MARKHAM



Organic farming methods stand test of time

It might seem like a hip new trend, but various forms of organic agriculture have been around for some 6,000 years.

Although it practically disappeared in North America during the latter half of the 20th century, organic farming has taken off recently, as consumers and farmers have discovered the benefits of a more holistic approach to agriculture.

Organic farming is rooted in ancient knowledge passed down through generations. Long before science could tell us why certain farming methods would produce greater crop yields, organic farmers were learning the hard way what worked and what didn't and shared their knowledge with others.

With the advent of industrial farming and the green revolution, organic farming was relegated to the status of quaint or old-fashioned — something practised by hippies on communes, certainly not by serious farmers.

But while the green revolution initially produced higher crop yields, it also created new problems, from fertilizer and pesticide run-off, to soil erosion and reduced soil fertility.

Today, new studies are showing organic agriculture can often match and sometimes exceed yields from conventional agriculture,



David Suzuki

while eliminating the need for pesticides and conserving soil quality.

The Rodale Farming Systems Trial is the longest-running comparison of organic and conventional farming in the United States. For 22 years, researchers have been planting crops at the Rodale farm in Pennsylvania using conventional agriculture, as well as two organic farming systems — one based on animal manure for fertilizer and the other based on nitrogen-fixing legumes.

Recently, a review of the trial was published in the journal *Bioscience*.

Researchers measured the economic feasibility of each farming system, along with their

environmental impacts, energy consumption and other indicators. They found for some crops such as corn and soybeans, organic farming systems produced the same yields as conventional systems, but used 30 per cent less energy, less water and no pesticides.

In fact, during drought years, corn yields in the organic systems were 30 per cent higher than those in the conventional system.

Researchers say that the organic systems were able to perform better in drought conditions because their soils contained much larger amounts of carbon and organic matter.

Increased organic matter also led to an increase in the diversity of creatures in the organic plots, including twice the number of earthworms.

In turn, increased diversity helped reduce damage from insect pests by introducing more natural predators.

One might expect the organic systems to have many beneficial environmental effects, but the researchers also found the organic systems could be as profitable or more profitable than conventional systems.

Although the organic systems required more labour (to remove weeds, for example, rather than spray them with a herbicide) consumers

were willing to pay a premium for organics, so the profit margins were often better.

The researchers argue organic technologies such as using off-season crops, using more extended crop rotations, increasing the amount of organic matter in the soil and improving natural biodiversity should be more widely adopted.

"Some or all of these technologies have the potential to increase the ecological, energetic and economic sustainability of all agricultural cropping systems, not only organic systems," they conclude.

In other words, many organic practices simply make sense, regardless of what overall agricultural system is used.

Far from being a quaint throwback to an earlier time, organic agriculture is proving to be a serious contender in modern farming and a more environmentally sustainable system over the long term. With consumers expressing a preference for organics and farmers are seeing the benefits, this is one trend that's likely to stay.

Take the Nature Challenge and learn more at www.davidsuzuki.org

LETTERS POLICY

The Sun-Tribune welcomes your letters. Submissions must be less than 400 words and include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The Sun-Tribune reserves the right to publish or not publish and edit for clarity and space.

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