

Stouffville Says

By Hannelore Volpe

What would you like Santa to bring you this Christmas?

—Asked at Strawberry Patch Montessori School in Stouffville



Jacob RINTJEMA

I would like a scooter — one with a motor. I want to ride it in front of my house.



Chantal CAMPBELL

I want a computer with a Dora the Explorer game.



Zoe SEDGEWICK

I want a girl Tamagotchi. I like to open my presents on Christmas morning with my family.



Katie CURRIE

I'd like a new dog, like my cousin's. It's a gold-coloured dog.

'WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS...'



STAFF PHOTO/SUSIE KOCKERSCHIEDT

Orchard Park Public School Grade 5 students sing Monday during Slapshot Santa, the school's annual Christmas concert.

Council takes another shot at developing hall, downtown

BY HANNELORE VOLPE
Staff Writer

Will you finally be seeing Stouffville's vacant municipal building flourishing in the not-too-distant future, a focal point for a sparkling new downtown, drawing residents and tourists alike?

The chances got better with Whitchurch-Stouffville council's decision Tuesday to go ahead with a search for something to put into the old town hall and specific work plans — with target dates attached.

Money has also been earmarked in the 2006 budget for downtown revitalization to the tune of \$150,000.

It's the first time a methodical, inclusive approach involving the major stakeholders in town has been used.

The strategy comes out of a town-run 'charette' where groups such as the Whitchurch-Stouffville Chamber of Commerce, the Stouffville Business Improvement Area, local landlords, citizens including students, the economic advisory committee and heritage advisory committee sat down over several days in September to hash out ideas for the entire downtown.

Town planner Andrew McNeely appeared hopeful, as he picked up a large bundle of documents and headed out of the meeting.

In the five years he's been

here, council has been unable to move forward in putting a thriving enterprise in the old town hall. And that's what has held up plans for the adjacent area, he said.

The last attempt to put a theatre and cultural arts centre in the old building was part of a proposal put forward by the Ventin Group. It envisioned a huge addition on the Civic Avenue building that would have encroached on the adjacent lawn bowling greens and butted against neighbours' fences. It was overwhelmingly nixed by council in April.

Council will have its acid test March 7. That's when they will vote on proposals from staff for the building. Some old proposals will be re-visited, Mr. McNeely noted.

Council agreed there would be no additions to the building and that it would not be sold. The potential use would have to promote increased pedestrian traffic in the downtown area and reinforce the meeting place role of Civic Square in front of the building and nearby Memorial Park.

At the same time, while town-owned buildings are being analysed to see how they can best be utilized, the search is still on for a location for a cultural and performing arts centre. Community consultations should take place in January and February with a final

report coming to council by March. Council will also look at moving the town offices back into the downtown area from its rented Sandiford Drive quarters.

Mayor Sue Sherban, who has fought long and hard to put a performing arts centre in the old building, says she will endorse the decision of her council — whether a performing arts centre goes into the old building or not.

"My personal commitment is to make sure before another election rolls by that there will be a decision on the old town hall," she said in an interview.

In the meantime, a number of committees have been deployed to reach specific objectives by specific dates. A downtown Stouffville working group is to be appointed April 18. When concerns were expressed about the committee being dissolved with next November's election,

Mayor Sherban noted it might be an independent committee, not a town committee. The town's parking and traffic circulation study comes before council March 7; the Memorial Park master plan is slated to be ready June 6. A report on changing the look of the downtown through signage is to be ready Feb. 7.

"There is no one solution for the downtown," Mr. McNeely said. "There is no magic pill. A whole series of approaches will be taken."

Briefly

Fireworks, Legion party on New Year's Eve

Are you looking for something to do on New Year's Eve?

• Mayor Sue Sherban's New Year's Eve celebration takes place in the Stouffville Memorial Park picnic shelter from 6 to 9 p.m.

Music will be provided by Shooting Stars Productions. From 7 to 9 p.m., there will be horse-drawn wagon rides from Lionel's Pony Farm.

Fireworks, by Pyro Mario, begin at 9 p.m.

Whitchurch-Stouffville volunteer firefighters will man the bonfire, the ice rink and cook hotdogs for residents.

The Stouffville Lions Club holds a games night in Latham Hall and serve up hot chocolate and cider.

• The Stouffville Royal Canadian Legion hosts its annual New Year's Eve party from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. in the legion hall on Ninth Line, north of Main Street.

Tickets are \$20 per person. Music by Tim Hewie and Larry Goguen, dancing, Chinese buffet dinner, party favours and champagne at midnight.

Questions for candidates?

Do you have a burning question you wish you could ask the candidates in your riding?

Is there something you need to know before you decide how you vote Jan. 23, but nobody's talking about it?

Who wants to wait for a candidates meeting, set aside an evening and wait in line in the hope you might get to ask your question?

That's why the York Region Newspaper Group is running an online candidates meeting.

Send your questions (please no more than 20 words) to dteetzel@yrng.com before 5 p.m. Mondays, then check election.yorkregion.com Thursday mornings to read the candidates' answers. Be sure to include your name and community with your question.

We'll also publish a selection of questions and answers each week in Thursday's newspaper.

We'll have new questions and answers every week from participating candidates in York Region's seven ridings, starting next week.

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