

Markham-Unionville parachute landing ground

BY CHRIS TRABER
Staff Writer

As a federal riding, Markham-Unionville seems like a nice place to run, but candidates don't necessarily want to live here.

Of the four national party candidates, none are actually residents.

Only NDPer Janice Hagan lives in Markham full time. But her home is in neighbouring Oak Ridges-Markham, not Markham-Unionville.

Liberal incumbent John McCallum, with homes in Ottawa, Oakville and Markham, spends most of his days in the nation's capital as our MP in addition to dual ministerial duties with national revenue and natural resources.

The Green Party's Wesley Weese lives in Belleville. And Conservative Joe Li resides in Scarborough.

So, what is it about wanting to represent a community in which you're not a day-to-day resident?

For Mr. McCallum it's about performance, not proximity.

"It's not so important where a person sleeps," he said. "Rather, it's what you do for those in the riding. I've represented Markham for five years. I believe I've done a lot and I feel privileged to represent the riding. I'd like the electorate to judge me on achievement, not where I live."

Pressed for information on his Markham address, Mr. McCallum was ambiguous.

"I don't want to get into the details," he said. "It's not a requirement (to live in a rid-

ing) but it is a commitment I made and honoured. I have three residences. I don't call any of them my principle residence. In terms of time, I spend most it in Ottawa."

Mr. Li, a self-employed chartered financial consultant with an office in Scarborough, said he owns a property in the Markham.

"Whether I win or lose, I'll be moving to Markham within the next 12 months," he said. "My office borders on the riding. I have many clients in Markham, I spend a lot of time in the community and I know it inside and out."

The Conservatives did have locals vying for party candidacy, he said.

"There were three challengers against me," Mr. Li said. "Eighty-two per cent of the (riding association) membership voted for me. They picked me based on commitment and experience. It's not like I'm going to run once and then run away."

In his second attempt to represent Markham-Unionville, the multilingual, Indian-born Mr. Li, hopes to market the party line to the 60 per cent immigrant population, including the 35 per cent who are Chinese.

"I speak Mandarin, Cantonese and Hakka, a significant Chinese dialect," he said. "I also speak Hindi and this time I am trying to make sure there's a different vote. This time I want to encourage that part of the community to come out and vote."

Journalist, musician and environmentalist, Mr. Weese is a candid candidate.

"If there's no local candi-

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date, we'll parachute one in," he said. "Generally, that's how it works. Obviously it would be preferable if there was a local person. Look, we don't even have an EDA (electoral district association) in Markham. My job description is to try and do my best to create awareness for the Green Party, move perception up a few notches and create a riding association for the next time."

Mr. Weese believes being a neophyte outsider has distinct benefits.

"Markham-Unionville is an odd and interesting place," he said. "It's one of the most educated and affluent communities in Canada. It's a high-tech capital and it's got upscale neighbourhoods. I understand rural issues more than urban. However, sometimes it takes an outsider to add perspective to

these issues.

"If elected, I suppose I'd spend most of my time in Ottawa. That's hypothetical and a stretch. But, I would be obligated to have a residence there just as I'd be obligated to represent the constituents' needs federally."

Because of riding boundary adjustments, Ms Hagan officially isn't a resident of the riding she's run in two provincial and a pair of federal elections.

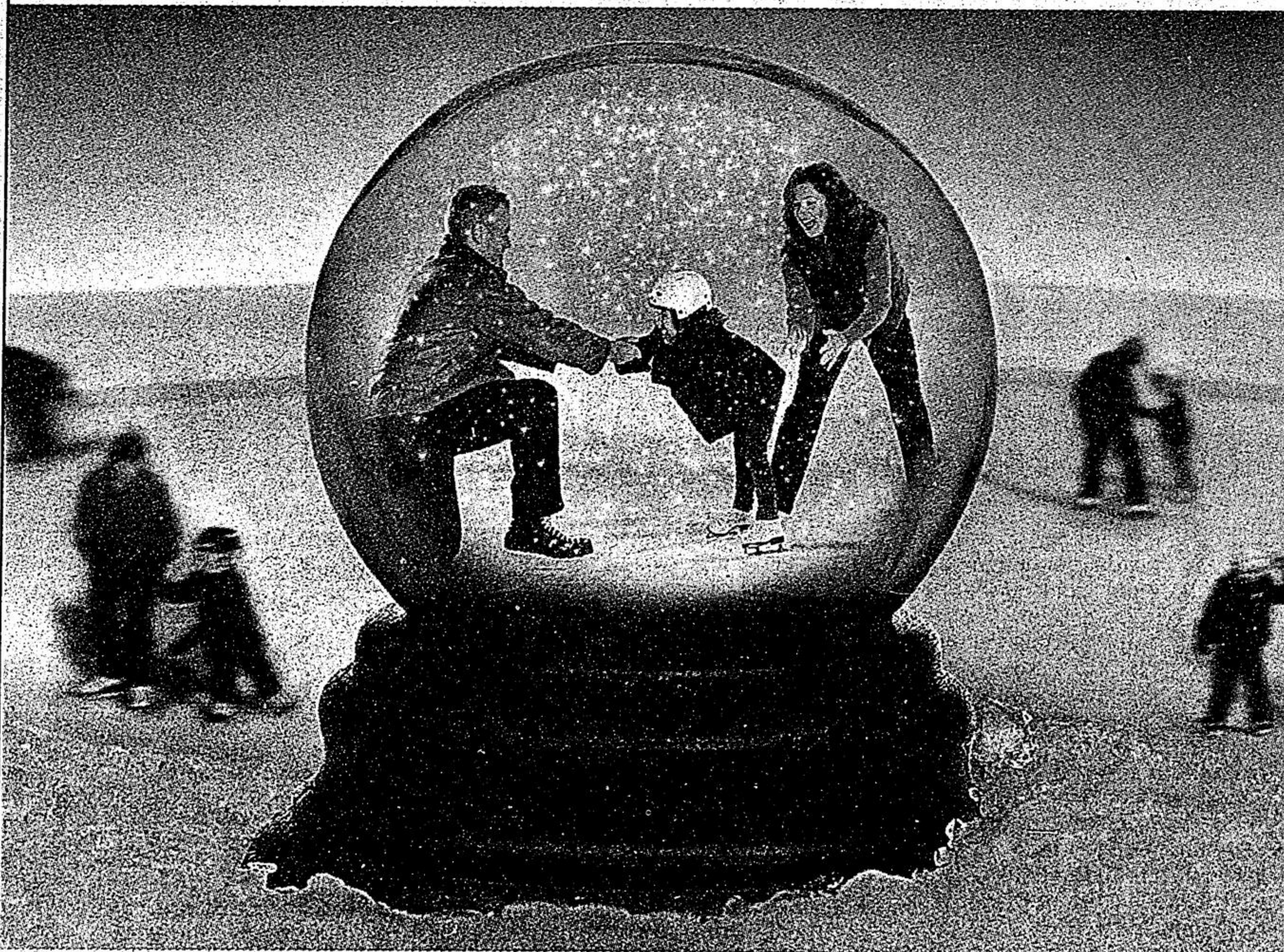
"Technically, I'm just outside the boundary, but I've lived here for 18 years, my

kids go to school in Markham and I've been a soccer coach in Markham and Unionville," she said. "But, yes, it is important to live in the community. That's what democracy is all about, being the voice of the people you represent."

Home-grown candidates are hard to find, she said.

"I wasn't going to ask the party to parachute a candidate in," she said. "Everyone's sick of backroom boys who have their heads in a trough telling our rep what to tell us and what's good for us."

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