

# From Music Mania cast to top crier on continent

BY JEFF HAYWARD  
Special

Hear ye, hear ye! A former Stouffville resident has been crowned North America's top town crier.

In a field of 27 competitors from across Canada and the U.S., Bill McKee out-cried the others to earn top spot at the North American Town Crier Championship in Ingersoll, Ont., last weekend.

This was Mr. McKee's fourth try at the honour. The town crier for Uxbridge, he came as close as second previously.

Mr. McKee was best known in Stouffville for his work on stage in Music Mania, the town variety show.

Marcel Bossi, Whitchurch-Stouffville's town crier, finished off the podium on the weekend.

"It's truly ironic that I am personally responsible for Bill McKee becoming a town crier," he said in jest, "and we (criers) have all collectively threatened to revoke his membership. The reason? He wins too often."

A panel of judges, made up of retired criers and Ingersoll citizens and politicians were impressed enough to give him the nod. Each participant was required to deliver three cries: Describing where their hometown is, an open cry and a diatribe about cheese.

He said in the first round, he used

poetry to describe the geography of north Durham, "and narrowed my way down to Uxbridge."

The second round he decided to focus on "early Canadian highlights" with an edge of humour, he said, noting he told the audience "1812 was the final score for Canada" among other historic facts with a twist.

He turned to technology to assist him in assembling the third cry, he said, which required him to mention 40 kinds of cheeses in 125 words.

He used the search engine Google to find the name of 635 cheeses, then crafted a monologue about two characters, Bree Colby and Monterey Jack.

During his speech one would say to the other, "Havarti?" and the other would respond, "Gouda, you?"

Mr. McKee said he and his wife Liz were treated like royalty in Ingersoll, noting its officials picked up the tab for their hotel stay. He also received a trophy, flask with his initials, and a pocket watch, along with "bragging rights for two years."

The position of town crier is thought to have originated in Europe in the late 1500s to early 1600s. The crier announced news to the public, many of whom were illiterate.

The next stepping stone for Mr. McKee is the 2007 world championship in Africa. However Mr.



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Former Stouffville resident Bill McKee won the North American Town Crier Championship in Ingersoll, Ont.

McKee noted he might not attend.

"It's a lot of money (to get there)," he explained. "There's unrest there politically."

He noted he has competed in

three global competitions and scored as high as ninth place. There are 400 criers representing communities throughout the world, he said.

Uxbridge hosted the provincial

town crier championship in July, but Mr. McKee could not defend his title at that event because he was the host. He also represents Port Perry and Oshawa.

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