

OPINION

Stouffville
Sun-Tribune

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Editorial

Embracing our new Stouffville

The face of Whitchurch-Stouffville is changing. And that's a good thing. What was "basically a white community", as Councillor Suzanne Hilton called it three years ago, is becoming more ethnically diverse.

Thank the growth of the past two years, made possible when the town hooked up to the York Durham sewage system.

Be prepared for more. The population of Whitchurch-Stouffville, which was 23,000 in 2001, will rise to 33,000 next year and 43,000 by 2013.

That means more diversity in a province and country whose population growth is largely the work of immigration.

We hope it won't mean another Markham where comments about language in signage other than English led to a race war.

What Regional Councillor Jack Heath of Markham called the "terrible incidents" of the mid-1990s — hurtful comments about the Chinese community stemming from ignorance — are hopefully far behind, along with lingering post-9/11 backlash felt by the region's Muslim community.

If anything, Whitchurch-Stouffville can learn from the mistakes of its neighbours to the south.

Regional chairperson Bill Fisch, said three years ago the past decade has brought big changes — most residents of Richmond Hill and Markham weren't born in Canada — but all have been positive.

People migrate to York for its quality of life and that, he said, includes the way the region embraces diversity.

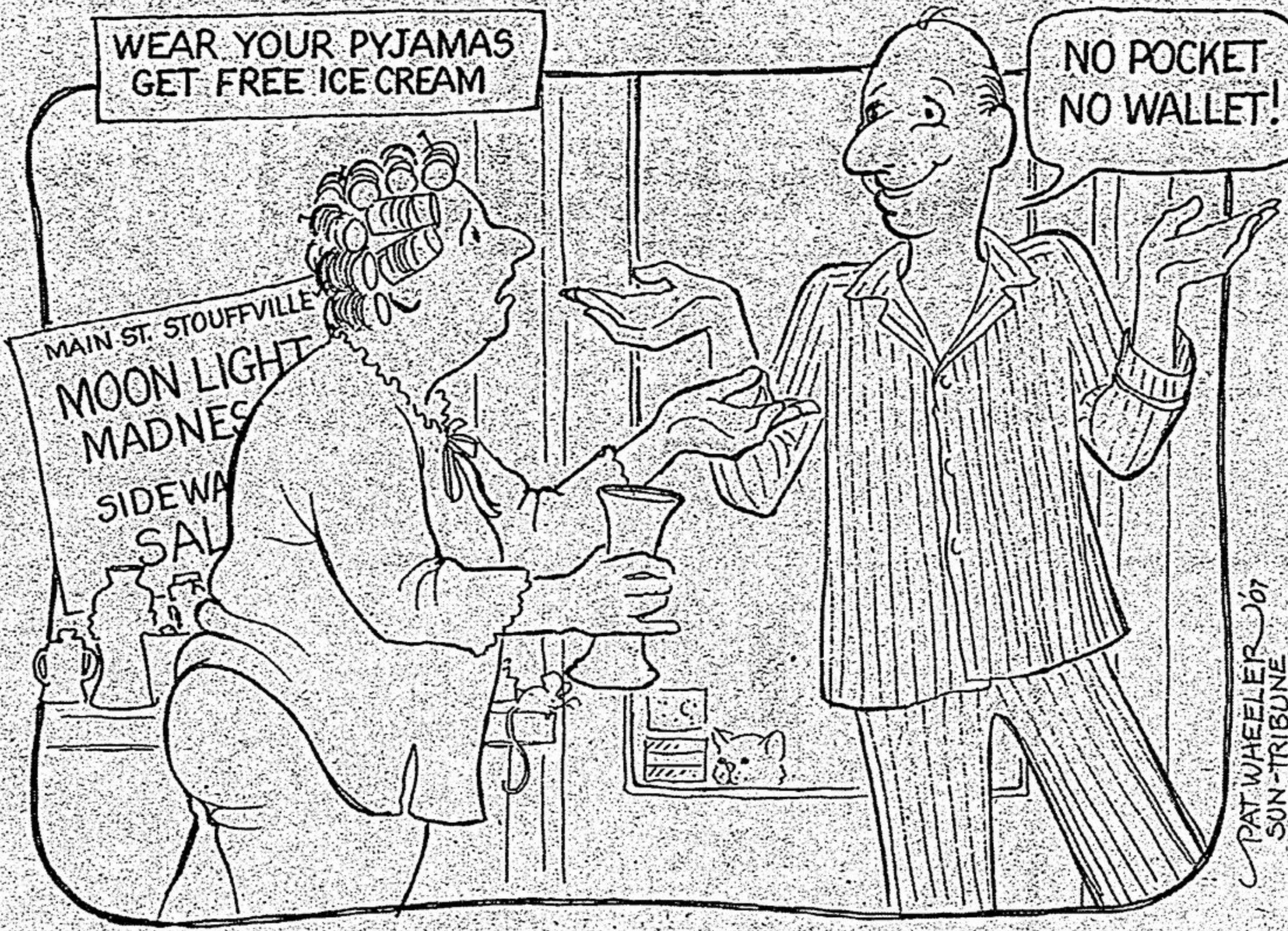
"If you look around the world, you realize what can happen when people don't get together as friends. We won't let that happen," Mr. Fisch said.

How true. Build a wall between old and new Stouffville and be prepared for trouble. Extend a hand and good will should result.

That goes for both sides in this marriage. Groups, churches, schools and individuals must roll out the welcome mat. Newcomers should seek out friends in their new community.

The late Kamil Sadiq, chief co-ordinator of the Canadian Federation of Intercultural Friendship founded the group to promote harmony between ethnic groups, an experience he said "changed my total view" of what could be done.

Whitchurch-Stouffville has declared itself diverse. Now, we all must put those words into action.



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

Tackling that end-of-summer things to do list

The days are getting tinier and the pile of back-to-school flyers on my porch not so much.

It's not yet snow tire season, but the children down the crescent are off to hockey practice. That has to be a sign.

Must be time to complete that summer to-do list before the short pants and coolers go into hibernation.

Must:

- Take in a fastball game in the wooden grandstand of Stouffville Memorial Park. Its future in doubt, thanks to the redevelopment of the park, it's time to renew acquaintances with the grand old beast. If those beams could only talk.

- Take lunch in the Stouffville Lions Gazebo on Main Street. Pick up a sub, bagel or a slice of pizza and watch people and vehicles from your private viewing suite. Sunglasses, bottle of ice water and 30 minutes of chilling.

- Hit more buckets of balls at the driving ranges of Whitchurch-Stouffville. Head down, feet in proper position, follow through... Perfect. Video games can't replicate that on a frosty February evening, no matter how high-def your system and TV are.

- Get call-blocking for the jackasses who fill my answering machine with home alarm system offers or interrupt dinner to try and sell MasterCards or windows.

- On a clear day, park near Bloomington and McCowan roads facing south and gaze down upon Toronto. Try to capture its enormity in an image. Watch the lights come on as day ends. Imagine the hours of commuting under way.

- Take a brisk walk through the York Regional Forest north of Ballantrae. Bring your own tunes or just soak in the sights and sounds, courtesy of Mother Nature. If you bring the dog, keep him on a leash, please.

- Enjoy another evening with friends on one of Stouffville's fine outdoor patios before the lawn chairs and tables are put to rest for another winter.

Jim Mason is editor of *The Sun-Tribune*.

Letters to the Editor

Letting autistic boy play soccer made everyone a winner

We are writing to express our gratitude and appreciation to the Whitchurch-Stouffville Soccer Club's players, referees and parents.

We were a bit reluctant to sign up our 11-year-old son, Ethan, with autism and sensory processing issues, for the regular soccer league within the club.

He had played the past three years, but now that the children were older and a bit more competitive, we thought that there would be no place for someone who was unable to keep up with the flow of the game and hold his own as a member of the team.

We thought the other children may just become frustrated with a teammate that made the balance with the other teams uneven.

But, Ethan loves soccer, loves to be able to run on the field, and wanted so much to play on a team in the regular league.

Boy were we wrong and pleasantly surprised.

On the first night, it was obvious Ethan was not able to keep up with the play as his response time was just too slow.

He would easily become distracted by a bright coloured flower, having to give us a thumbs up in excitement if he touched the ball or by the other teams playing on the field.

The coach, Tony, took it all in stride. He was Ethan's coach in a previous year and just simply suggested he speak to the other coaches to see if they were OK with having Ethan as the "seventh man" on the field.

We never did hear of a meeting or if there were any objections. All we know is that every week

Ethan puts on his soccer uniform with excitement and dedication.

We go to the soccer field and when Ethan wants to play, he asks the coach (which is amazing in itself) who sends him out. He is not counted in the allotted numbers allowed out. He is an extra player who follows the ball, if only by sight.

Instead of hearing complaining about this being unfair, we hear the other parents cheer when Ethan kicks the ball. We hear the other children on his team call him out to the field to play. We see the children on the other teams encouraging him to kick the ball.

We don't believe Ethan is aware of this special attention, but because of it he has come such a long way. He is comfortable with going out on the field with the other players.

He is able to run and actually keep up with the play. He will chat with the goalie and the other players when the ball is not nearby.

All these things are huge accomplishments for our son, all made possible because of an understanding coach and supportive teammates, players, referees and parents.

There is so much more happening out there on the soccer field and we believe everyone is learning and benefiting by it.

We couldn't have worked out something better if we had tried. It was a spontaneous situation that has enabled a little boy with special needs to just be another kid on the field.

He is just thrilled when he is able to kick the ball during a game.

Who knows, maybe one day he'll even get a goal.

MICOLE & BRENT ONGMAN
STOUFFVILLE

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

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