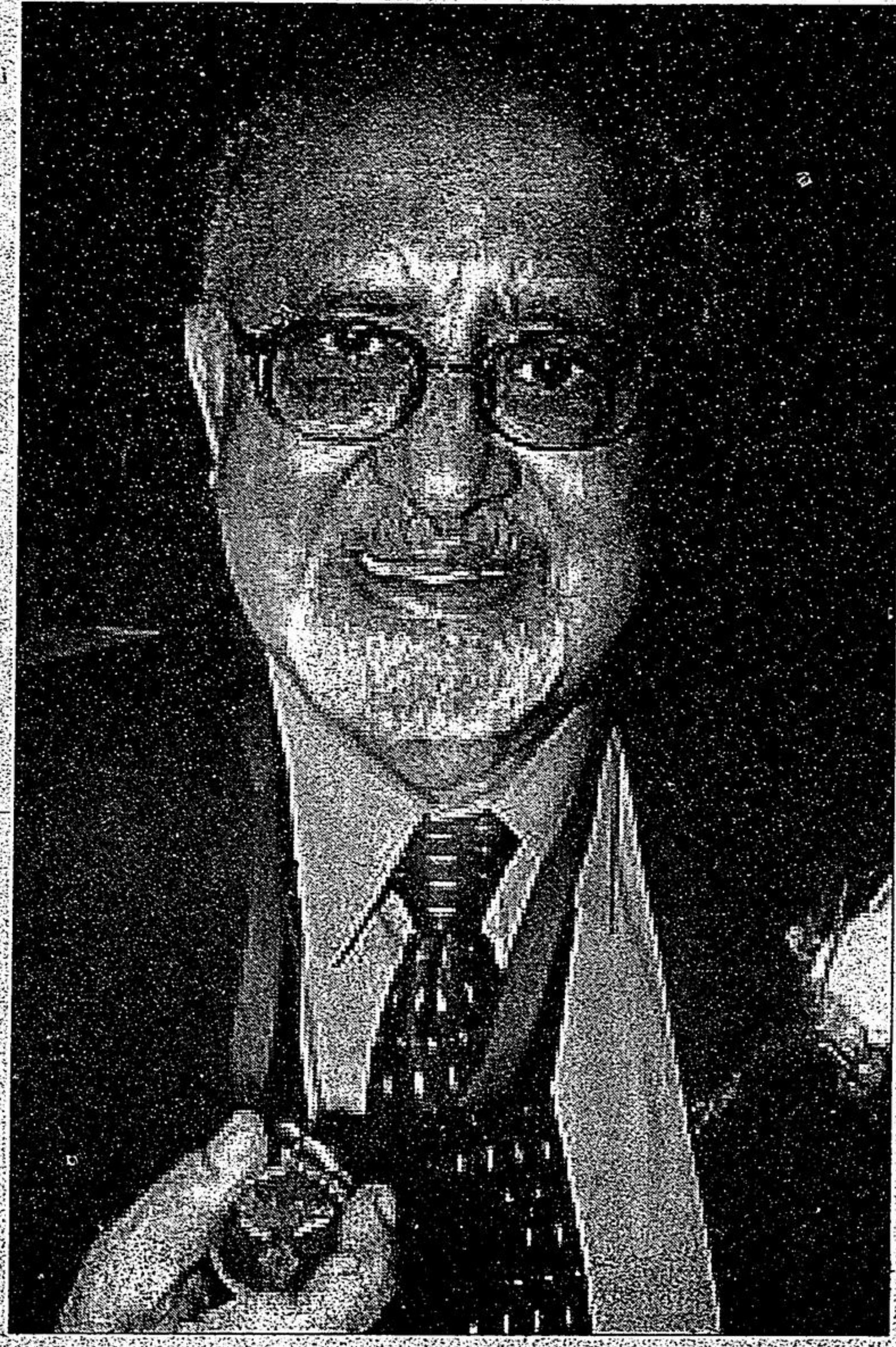


Don't take peace for granted: medallist

YMCA honours Stouffville man with medallion for peace tree initiative



BY DAVE TEETZEL
Staff Writer

Canada can't afford to take its peace, diversity and harmony for granted, the winner of the Markham YMCA peace medallion said.

Whitchurch-Stouffville resident Ranjit Kumar received the award Friday morning at the Markham Civic Centre.

Mr. Kumar spearheaded the York Region Peace Tree initiative, which he hopes to grow to become a peace garden at the Community Safety Village at Bruce's Mill Conservation Area on Stouffville Road.

Inspired by a film, the peace tree is decorated with symbols from various cultures and faiths, encouraging young people to learn more about one another.

WORK IN 60 COUNTRIES

Mr. Kumar is founding president and CEO of the Foundation for International Training, a non-profit agency working on more than 600 development projects in more than 60 countries.

He warned in his acceptance speech the Canadian cultural mosaic, "if it's not carefully nurtured... could become a nation of 1,000 solitudes".

This is why he uses the peace tree to promote cross-cultural bonding, he told the crowd. However, he noted the need for more initiatives to integrate newcomers into the workplace.

"Our children, I'm sure they

will grow up into cosmopolitan citizens, however, I am more concerned about the adults," Mr. Kumar said.

Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti, who presented the award along with Markham-Unionville MPP Michael Chan, recalled working with Mr. Kumar on the town's integration planning initiative.

'FOUNTAIN OF WISDOM'

"Every time he spoke, we stood back like there was this fountain of wisdom and we could see why he was so successful in his life," Mr. Scarpitti said.

Mr. Kumar was nominated for the award by former councillor Khalid Usman.

The medallion is presented by the YMCA annually in recognition of Peace Week to volunteers working to find peaceful solutions to conflict, discrimination and injustice.

Other York Region recipients were the late Const. Davis Ahlowalia of Richmond Hill and Wanda Bigcanoe of Georgina Island.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of recognizing community peace builders in Canada by awarding them the YMCA Peace Medallion.

Since 1987, about 900 individuals and groups have received YMCA Peace Medallions during YMCA World Peace Week.

For more information on the YMCA, go to ymca.ca.

Whitchurch-Stouffville's Ranjit Kumar displays the YMCA Peace Medallion he received Friday at the Markham Civic Centre.

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Koritko is referring to the thousands of lakes, wetlands and rivers in the 1.8 million acres of protected Greenbelt land that wraps around the Golden Horseshoe.

The Greenbelt area includes the Oak Ridges Moraine, which is often referred to as the "rain barrel of southern Ontario." The rolling hills in the Moraine are actually sand and gravel aquifers that store and filter rain and snow melts, supplying a clean source of groundwater to over 65 rivers and streams where many of Ontarians get their water.

Koritko isn't alone in her concerns over clean water. In a 2007 Environics Poll, Ontarians ranked concern about water pollution second only to their concern about air pollution. The Greenbelt is easing these worries. Ninety-two per cent of poll respondents agree that protecting the natural water systems is one of the top benefits of the Greenbelt.

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