

Goodbye, Stouffville, hello, Abu Dhabi

This weekend, Stouffville's Rob McKenzie, wife Pam Mandich and daughter McKenzie fly out of Pearson International Airport en route to Abu Dhabi, said to be the richest city in the world.

Abu Dhabi, on a T-shaped island jutting into the Persian Gulf, has a population of two million. It's part of the United Arab Emirates, bordering Saudi Arabia and Oman.

It's there Mr. McKenzie, a former front-page editor with the National Post, has accepted the challenge of starting a new international newspaper.

The first edition is expected to roll off the presses this spring. He's the production manager.

McKenzie, in Grade 7, will attend a private school.

Although a resident of Stouffville only seven years, Pam Mandich is well known. Because of her associations, all volunteer, her departure leaves big shoes to fill.

Perhaps most prominent has been her work with the York-Durham Academy of the Performing Arts where she spent countless hours preparing costumes for hundreds of children in dozens of shows.

In addition, she's a charter member of the Toastmaster's Club and, until recently, served as community representative on the Glad Park Public School council.

She was also an enthusiastic supporter of the Clocktower theatre project and Stouffville's Motus 'O dance company.

In 2006, she made a bid for a seat on Whitchurch-Stouffville council and although unsuccessful, she considers it a valuable learning experience.

"I take my hat off to anyone willing to serve in this capacity," she said. "It's a big job."

Born at Kingston, ON, one of five in the family of Steve and Carole Mandich, Pam attended Fanshawe College in London and later the University of Western Ontario where she obtained an honours degree in sociology and, later, a master's degree in journalism.



Roaming Around
with Jim Thomas

She's already a world traveller, having visited India, Nepal, Burma, Indonesia, Malaysia and parts of South America.

Rob is a graduate of Carleton University in Ottawa. Before joining the staff of the Globe and Mail and later The National Post, he worked at the Montreal Gazette.

Following their marriage, Rob and Pam searched for a small town in which to put down roots.

Initially, they considered Port Hope or Bowmanville, but the distance from Rob's work made them impractical. Then they visited Stouffville.

"We loved the old homes here and their beautiful gardens," Pam recalled.

"But most of all, we appreciated the friendliness of the people. They'd wave and say hello even though they didn't know us."

Over the Internet, they found a home that met their needs.

"The minute I walked in the front door I said, this is the house for us," she said.

That was seven years ago. Pam describes her association with academy as amazing.

Wayne Hill, (the director), puts his heart into this project and all for the kids," she said. "He's totally dedicated."

At Glad Park school, she and Kathy Moyer introduced what is now known as the kiss-and-ride program.

"With so many buses and cars converging on the area at the same time, it was an accident waiting to happen," she remembered.

The traffic pattern now in use has solved most of these problems, she thinks.

As for pulling up stakes

and moving to a country she knows little about, Pam says she's equal to the challenge.

"Life can change on a dime," she said.

A furnished apartment will be waiting when they arrive. Rob's been in Abu Dhabi since mid-October. He's returning to Stouffville today. They leave together Sunday.

All but one.

Kiki, the family's pet bichon-poodle, has been relocated to a new home.

It was thought he wouldn't

survive the area's extreme heat.

Mid-summer temperatures in Abu Dhabi often reach 40 degrees Celsius.

"We'll miss him and we'll certainly miss Stouffville," says Pam.

For how long?

"A very long time," she admitted sadly. "Maybe forever."

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 50 years.

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