

Stouffville Sun-Tribune

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Our 24th annual festival is underway in Memorial Park

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Bruce's Mill butterflies remember loved ones

Memorials help bereaved families

BY ALYSHIA HIGGINS

Hundreds of butterflies, to be released over the countryside of Whitchurch-Stouffville next weekend, will symbolize not only beauty, but memories of loved ones.

They include Dan McNeil.

Sheila McNeil, Dan's mother, will participate again in the second annual butterfly release July 5.

"(Last year), it was absolutely beautiful," she said. "It was so sad, yet it was so meaningful. It just felt right to do it."

Dan, a popular Stouffville District Secondary School graduate, died in 1992 in a car crash. His name is on an award presented annually to an outstanding player by the Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association.

Since his death, Mrs. McNeil has been involved with Bereaved Families of York Region. This year, proceeds from the butterfly release will benefit the charity, as well as St. Mark's Church in Stouffville.

The event takes place at Bruce's Mill Conservation Area on Stouffville Road, between Kennedy Road and Warden Avenue.

Live music, inspirational readings and the announcement of each person's name will take place at the release.

Mrs. McNeill said the butterfly

See BUTTERFLIES, page 7.

PYRO MARIO'S PRIMED TO LIGHT UP YOUR CANADA DAY



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEN

Stouffville's Mario Vella handles a sparkler in preparation for his annual fireworks show in Memorial Park on Canada Day. He loves his work.

Fireworks are in sky artist's blood

BY ALYSHIA HIGGINS

During the day, Mario Vella constructs buildings. At night, he blows things up.

Mr. Vella, or "Pyro Mario" as he is called, has been the man behind the fireworks in Stouffville Memorial Park on Canada Day for several years.

He is looking forward to lighting up the sky with another unique show Tuesday at dusk.

"I love it," he said. "We are the artists of the sky, as the saying goes."

▶ Setting off your own fireworks? Be very careful. See story on page 8.

Mr. Vella has lived in Stouffville for 18 years and is a Level 2 Pyro Technician. Only 300 exist in Canada.

"(As a Level 2), I can fire eight-inch to 16-inch fireworks which go anywhere from 800 to 1,600 feet in the air and are 800 to 1,600 feet wide," he said.

Being of European background,

Mr. Vella said, as a child, he was interested in fireworks and was exposed to them regularly.

"I saw fireworks almost everyday," he said. "It's in my blood."

The 45-year-old father of two does fireworks shows all over Ontario and Quebec. He puts on about 12 a year, including corporate events, weddings, birthdays and festivals.

The fireworks he uses at the festival come from around the world, and have a variety of different effects, including exploding into shapes.

"It's a big hit with the kids. They see the happy faces and the stars and they love it," he said.

Despite being around explosives, Mr. Vella said he's never had an accident.

"I still have all 10 fingers," he joked.

As for what the future holds, he's happy to continue lighting up the sky.

"I'm probably going to do this until the day I die," he said. "It's a piece of me that I can show to everybody."

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