

THANK YOU, DON!

Whitchurch-Stouffville's citizen of the year

DR. DON PETRIE



Awards courtesy Awards4u, Gormley

Soybean farm grows by the truckload

BY CHRIS TRABER
Staff Writer

The dust has cleared on the Markham Airport mystery.

It began when a seemingly seamless convoy of dump trucks arrived full of soil and exited empty.

Their destination was the private 250-acre facility on Hwy. 48, just south of the Markham/Whitchurch-Stouffville border.

Residents, including neighbour Dave Shortreed, couldn't help but notice the trucks. Naturally, he was curious.

"It's been going on for about a year," he said. "Some days there'd be 600 trucks. You don't need a calculator to figure out that's a lot of dirt going in. There were no signs, no permits. No one seemed to know what was going on."

While the noise and dust were occasionally bothersome, locals were more interested in knowing why so much earth was being hauled to tiny, rural airport.

Mr. Shortreed made inquiries. Provincial and federal parliamentarians couldn't determine the exact reason for the influx of fill. Neither could town officials.

Officials could only confirm there was nothing sinister about the operation.

The reason for the layering of land came from the airport's general manager and operator.

"Beans," said Allan Rubin. "Soy beans. We've been doing some reclamation work based on an approved 1986 plan for an organic farming operation."

The topsoil is also being used to fill in swamp areas, he said. While the property is primarily a private airstrip, historical aircraft repository and

occasional film set, the unused 150 acres was fallow until it was zoned for farming.

The topsoil being trucked in will facilitate an expanded organic soy and clover on a rotated basis, Mr. Rubin said.

"Because we are an airport, we're growing crops that won't exceed 18 to 20 inches," he said. "We've been zoned agricultural and aeronautic for several years."

Despite the authorized farming and landfill, there have been a number of inquiries from residents, public servants and environmentalists.

"It's caused us a few headaches," he said. "We make absolutely sure we comply. We applied for and got an inspection from the (federal) Fisheries and Oceans Ministry because we're filling swamp areas that affect local rivers. We got a clean bill of health."

Issues about the farming operation at the airport have circled like aircraft above it, Markham council member John Webster said. Since the facility is under the auspices of Transport Canada, Markham has no jurisdiction.

"There have been some complications," Mr. Webster said. "Depending on who you talked to, residents were wondering what type of fill was being used and some worried about the dust and noise. Others just want to know the farming operation is being run properly."

The councillor confirmed the airport's agricultural wing is following every rule and regulation.

"I also understand the Environment Ministry has done tests and there are no pollutants," he said. "The operators have been good at keeping the dust down with water trucks and they bought a street sweeper to clean dirt off Hwy. 48."



Steady stream of trucks into Markham Airport lands just south of Stouffville raised curiosity of neighbours. Turns out the soil will be for an organic farming operation.

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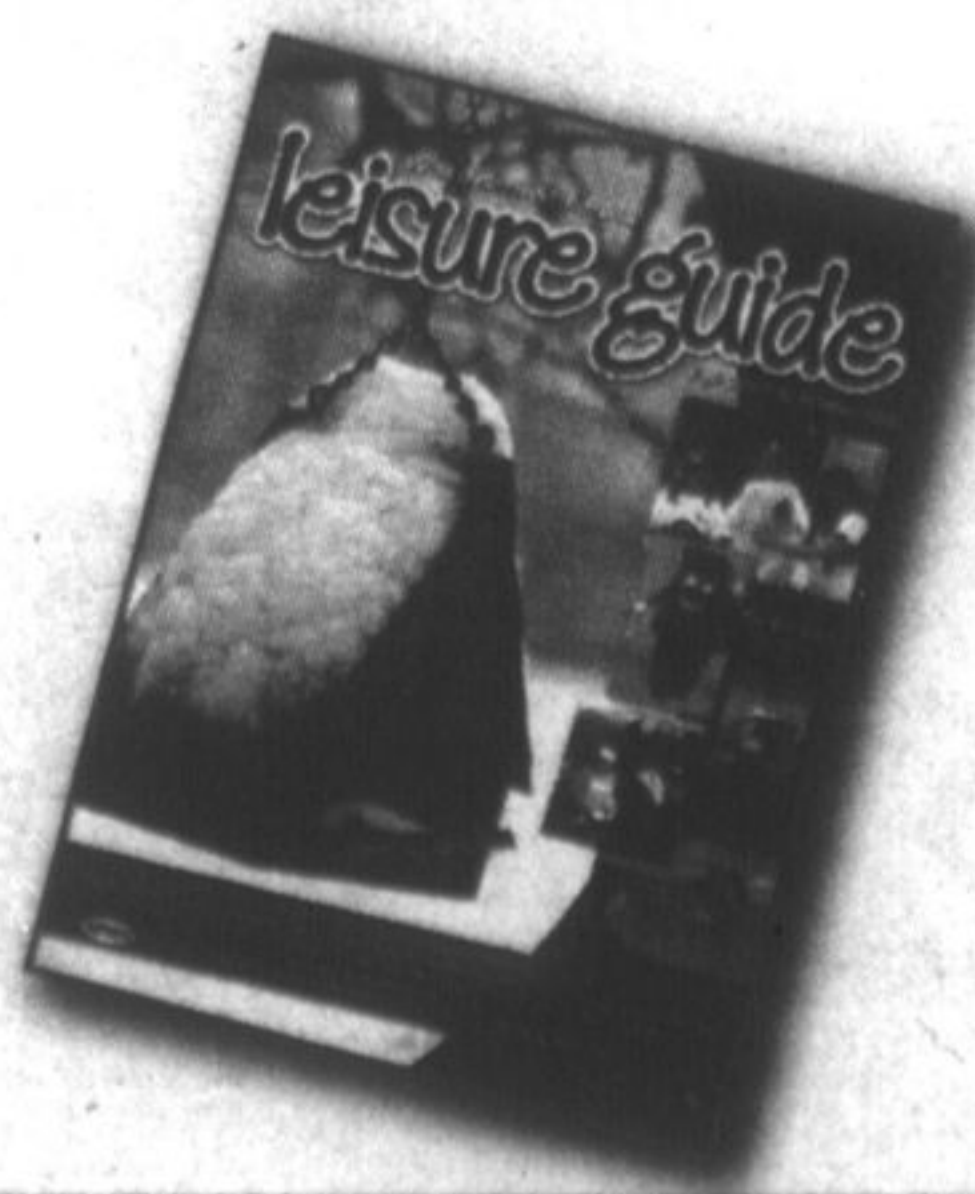
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