

# 'The Stouffville Fair'

*Seeley family, volunteers add Stouffville flavour to next week's 164th annual Markham Fair*

BY SIMONE JOSEPH  
Staff Reporter

For Whitchurch-Stouffville's Dennis Seeley, being part of the Markham Fair is a family affair.

"I married my wife and the fair at the same time," he said. "Their family is involved in running the Markham Fair. It was automatic I would become involved. They are totally immersed."

Mr. Seeley married his wife, Gerri, 39 years ago. She later went on to become president of the women's section of the fair (now called home craft); her parents, Howard and Mary Cosburn, were presidents of the fair and her brother Mac was also a president at one time.

Mr. Seeley's son, Blair, is president this year and the Seeleys grandchildren are competing in the fair.

Within this family, there are 300 years of service with all of the members combined, Mr. Seeley said.

So what is the appeal in this annual fair, now 164 years old?

"I like the wholesomeness of it. I like the sense of community. There are 700 volunteers at the fair, most of whom refer to the Markham Fair family, it is like an extended family. You do not hesitate to call the fair if you need help. There is a sense of providing something good for the community, of entertaining," said Mr. Seeley, a Stouffville resident who lived in Unionville for 36 years.

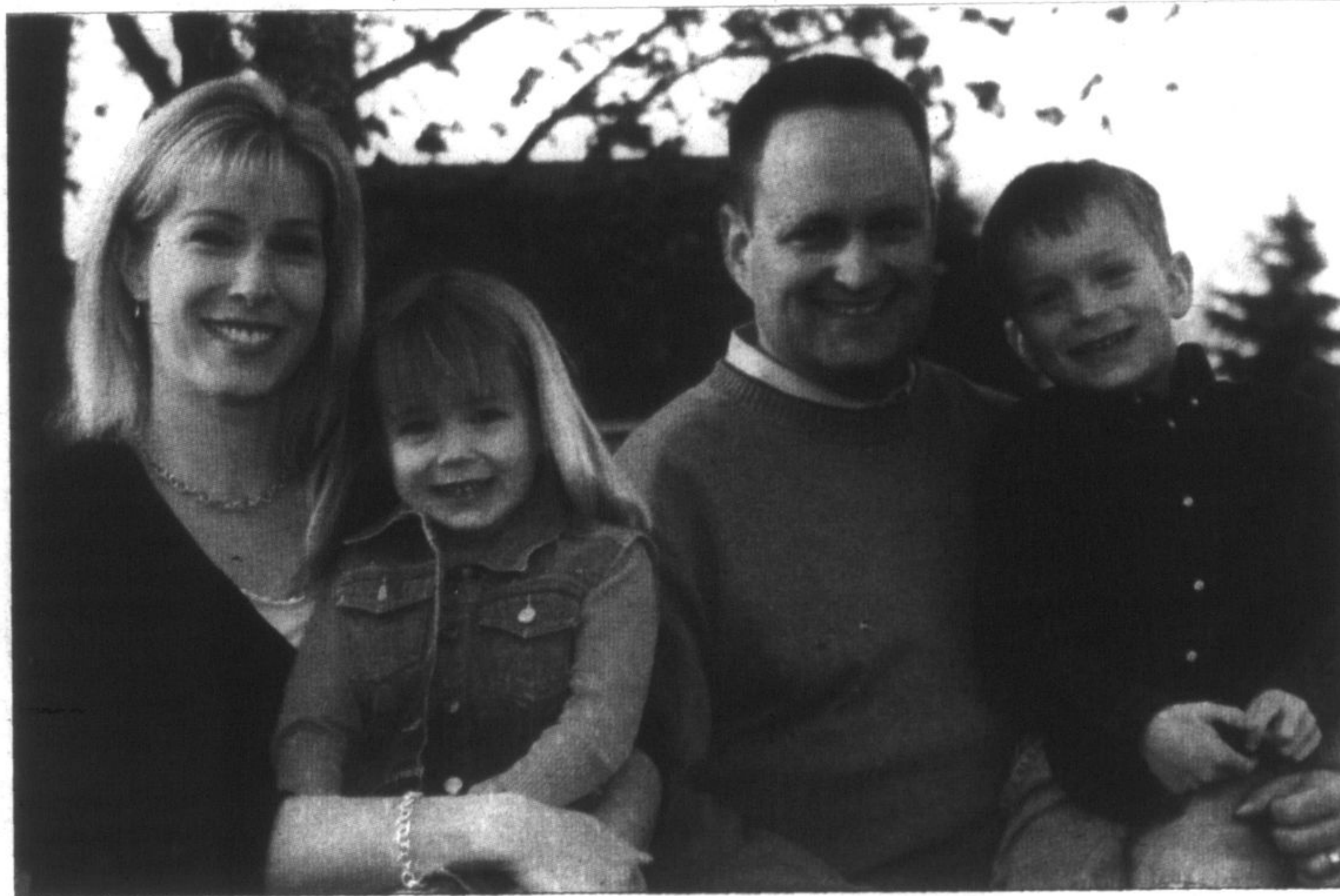
Blair Seeley has been involved in the fair since he was born.

"To watch people take in this great family event, that is pretty special," he said. "The fair has been very much a part of my family for several generations."

Same with his wife Jenn's family. Her grandmother, Lylia Jones, is receiving her 35-year award from the fair this year.

The Markham Fair is an annual event hosted by the Markham and East York agricultural society.

It is considered one of Canada's oldest country fairs. Since 1844, the fair has provided a showcase for talents and products in a friendly, competitive spirit. With more than 670 volunteers working on more than 70 committees,



Markham Fair president Blair Seeley, his wife, Jenn, and their children Brian and Laura at their Stouffville-area home. Both of their families have grown up with the annual fall fair.

Markham Fair is thought to be the largest community-based volunteer organization in Canada.

The fair happens annually the weekend before Thanksgiving, and hosts close to 60,000 attendees. In addition to the competitive displays, the fair includes other forms of entertainment such as the horse pull, demolition derby,

tractor pull, midway rides and displays of farm animals.

The "Markham" in Markham Fair can be somewhat misleading because while the event takes place in Markham, it draws people from other communities, too.

"We are seeing bigger numbers from outlying areas — Stouffville, Uxbridge and Mount Albert,"

Blair said. Also, more than half the fair's board of directors is from the Stouffville area, Dennis Seeley said.

Almost as many people are taking the designated public bus to the fair from Stouffville as from Markham.

A special fair bus travels from Markville Shopping Centre north on McCowan Road. The bus also travels from the GO station as well as other points in Stouffville to get to the fair.

The fair has also expanded and changed in other ways.

The early years of the fair featured more livestock and shows but with the decline in agriculture, the event features less agricultural shows and entries.

"We are finding ways to present the rural, agricultural background while struggling to get livestock entries," Blair Seeley said.

For the first time, this year's fair will include an antique display.



STAFF FILE PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

ET The Mime pretends to flee from young tractor drivers at last year's fair. This year's event runs Oct. 2 to 5 at Markham Fairgrounds.

Go to [www.markhamfair.ca/](http://www.markhamfair.ca/) for more information.

## your PLANNER

### Fair highlights, Oct. 2 to 5

The Stouffville Sun-Tribune asked Dennis and Blair Seeley to describe some of the new and different highlights of the Markham Fair this year. Here are some of those highlights, gleaned from father and son — former and current presidents of the fair:

• The Toronto Police Force's mounted unit will present demonstrations and shows. Look out for them on Thursday, Oct. 2 at 11:30 a.m. at the racetrack; Friday, Oct. 3 at 11:15 a.m. at the livestock arena or Sunday, Oct. 5 at 12:30 p.m. at the livestock arena. The Toronto Police Force's mounted unit will also appear daily at the fairgrounds.

• See and ride the monster trucks at the Markham Fair from Thursday, Oct. 2 to Sunday, Oct. 5 on the racetrack. The fair has hosted smaller shows in the past but this year's promises to be bigger.

• Check out the antiques sale in the livestock barn. Fewer and fewer animals in the fair means organizers have had to come up with more creative ways of filling the barn.

• Susan Brown performs Friday, Oct. 3 from 2 to 4 p.m. in the entertainment tent. In the past 10 years, Ms Brown has travelled extensively as a guest soloist with Stouffville's Men of Note and with the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir. She has performed at Carnegie Hall in New York, in Germany, on tour in the Maritimes and the Yukon, as well as across Ontario.

Ms Brown sings powerful hymns, songs from the big musicals and folk music from the Maritimes and Ireland.

• On Friday, Oct. 3, enjoy the performance of Shania Twain "The Premier Tribute to Shania Twain" in the livestock arena. 7 to 9:30 p.m.

Go to [www.markhamfair.ca/](http://www.markhamfair.ca/) for a full listing of events.

#### History of the fair

Originally, agricultural societies would meet on a regular basis to discuss various concepts of agricultural improvement such as livestock development and increased grain yields. Often, the society would collectively purchase a bull or seed grain, which would be made available to members only. The fall fair would then be an opportunity for the farmers to compete by showing off the fruits of their labour. Due to increased technology and rapid communication, agricultural societies no longer find it necessary to provide this service. The Markham Fair continues to create the forum known as the fall fair.

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