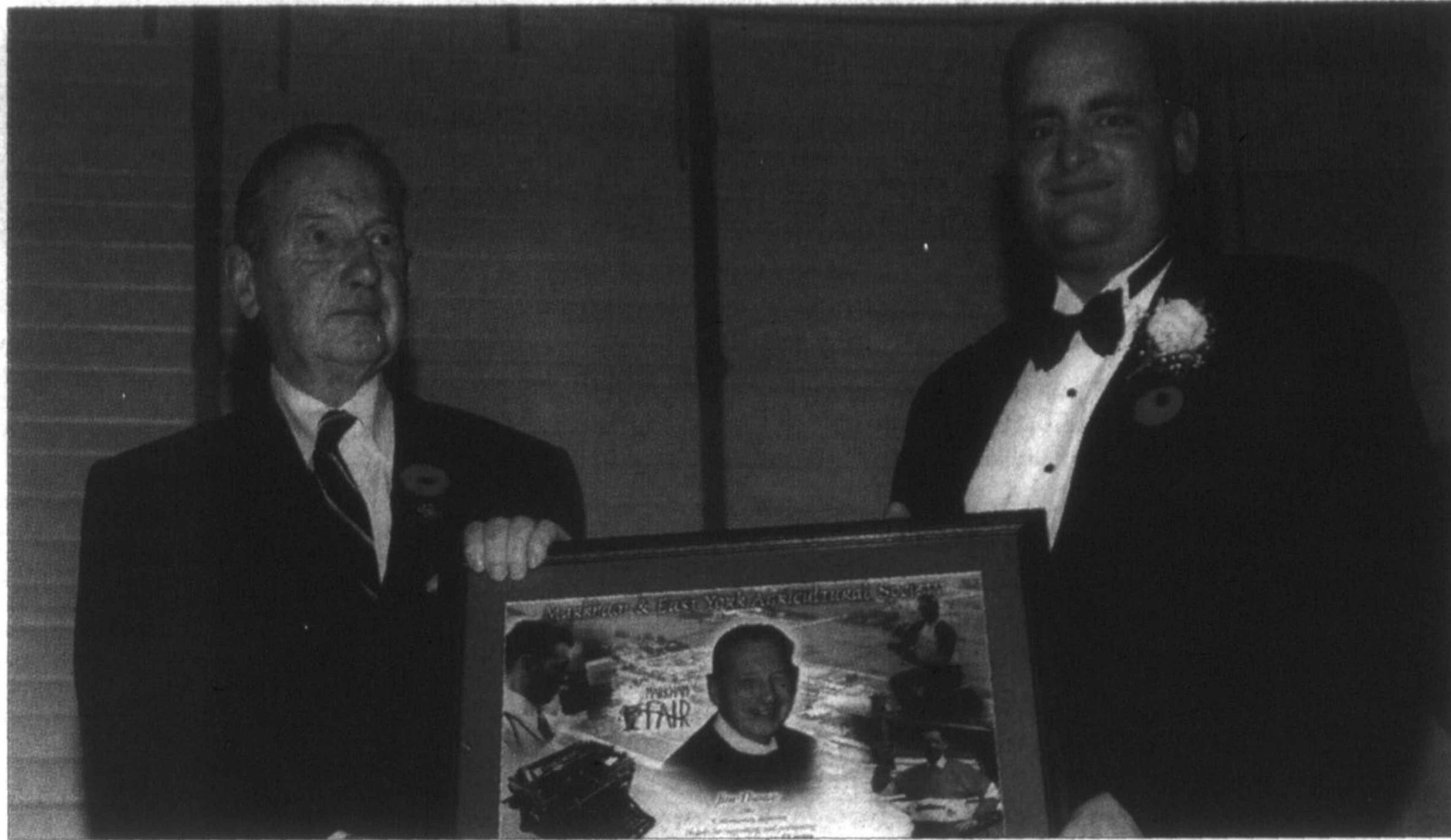


# SUN-TRIBUNE PEOPLE

Stouffville's Blair Seeley (right), president of the Markham Fair, presents an award to Sun-Tribune columnist Jim Thomas at the fair's president's night Saturday. Mr. Thomas was honoured for his decades of work with fair board members. See Mr. Thomas' column on page 7 for the story of Mr. Seeley, who received a kidney transplant while serving as president.



## 'Scoop's' career toasted by fair board

SUN-TRIBUNE WRITER  
JIM THOMAS SALUTED  
AS COMMUNITY ICON

BY T. ROGERS GARDHAM

There are certain people, who when their names are mentioned, conjure up images of warmth, justice, human caring, and leadership in a community. The person may be a community leader, preacher, teacher or business person.

Today we call such people community icons, in this case two communities, Markham and Stouffville.

Jim Thomas is such a person.

A crowd of more than 600 people, including Markham Fair directors, committees, volunteers and community representatives, gathered in the fair's General Exhibits building for the annual President's Banquet, rose from their seats as one, and accorded Jim a standing ovation.

He was presented with the Fair's Award (first time ever in its 164-year history) for meritorious service to the communities, agriculture and Markham Fair.

In his presentation remarks, Dennis Seeley, a past president (1981), praised Jim, who he referred to as "Scoop" Thomas, for his constancy in supporting the fair with newspaper coverage, through fair times and foul, for more than 50 years.

Jim was born April 9, 1929, on the 100-acre family farm of Herb and Catherine Thomas on the Ninth Line of Markham, just north of where the hospital is now located.

He has two brothers, Bob (Edna) and Don (Doris, a 36 year volunteer and former director of the Fair) and a sister, Betty (Norman).

The living room of the Thomas's home in Stouffville exudes a feeling of warmth and hominess. A picture is observed in the hallway of Jim, his wife, Jean, and their three girls and three boys standing on a foot bridge in a park. There are seven grandchildren.

### ROOKIE SPORTSWRITER

As a newspaper man, Jim has an uncommon interest in, and insight into, people, a gift he attributes to his close relationship with his mother, a teacher who was instrumental in his becoming a reporter.

Jim was asked to work for the Stouffville Tribune in 1951, mainly as a sports writer. He lights up when he talks about the Stouffville Clippers hockey team winning the Ontario Sr. B championship in 1952.

It was then he began writing about Markham Fair.

He is almost apologetic when he explains he has not been heavily involved with the fair, in spite of attending annually for 70 years.

He does highlight the fact when he was a kid on the farm all work ceased on Saturday at noon and the whole family went to "the Fair". He also says with pride, "due to Gerri Seeley", he was judge for three years of Miss Markham Fair ("a tough job, but someone had to do it") and "for two years, thanks to Marion Norton, I judged the pet contest".

Jim has always been a strong fan of the fair and when he became editor of the Markham Economist in 1974, he committed to give the fair increased coverage. He recalls an early conversation with the then fair's secretary, Gerry Mann.

"The fair had not been used to extensive paper coverage and in my exuberance I began to set deadlines for fair reports, especially horse racing and livestock class winners," Jim said. "Gerry, in his inimitable way, explained, 'well, Jim, I have to wait for the races to be run and the judging to be completed before I can give the results'; I learned a lot about the Fair that year!"

Jim also appreciates the great relationship he has had with other fair secretaries, Tony Arkell, Dave Morrison and Dan O'Brien.

Jim was editor of the Markham Economist & Sun and the Stouffville Tribune at a time when both communities were in the grip of massive change.

Boundaries changed, the population exploded, Markham Fair moved and Markham Stouffville Hospital was approved.

His support for the fair was most pronounced through the 1970s when the fair board sold its property at highways 7 and 48.

The annual fair had been held there for more than a century, and the move in 1977 was not universally accepted by residents. Throughout these major changes 'Jim's papers' provided accurate information and general support for the fair's direc-

tors, which had a positive influence on the public at a time when conversations were rife with rumours.

The first fair at the new location was greeted by what was described as "the worst wind and rain storms in 30 years", which started during Friday night and ended around 6 p.m. on Sunday.

### MOVING TIME FOR FAIR

Here's an excerpt from an editorial published following that fair:

"Brighter fair days ahead - The weatherman dealt fair officials a cruel blow. Outside activities could only be described as a 'washout'. Still the show had to go on, and go on it did. Thanks to excellent indoor facilities, most programs were carried through on schedule, even some that hadn't been planned for these locations. Strained between feelings of disappointment and a desire to make the best of a bad situation, officials concluded that Markham Fair being a 'people place', the best interests of the people should prevail. All things being right, this year would have set a new (attendance) record. The Fair With a Future will see better (and brighter) days ahead".

Although he retired in 1989, Jim still writes a weekly column for the Stouffville Sun-Tribune. Besides providing insight into fair happenings, he also paints beautiful word portraits with feeling on the people who also serve and appreciate the fair.

T. Rogers Gardham is past-president of Markham Fair who still volunteers with the fair tradition.

## Whitchurch-Stouffville News Digest

Visit [yorkregion.com](http://yorkregion.com) for more on these and other stories

### Remembrance Day events hosted by Stouffville Legion

Whitchurch-Stouffville residents will have three chances to remember this week, thanks to Stouffville Branch 459 of the Royal Canadian Legion.

A remembrance service will be held Sunday at 1 p.m. in the Stouffville Cemetery, Tenth Line south of Main Street.

The larger Remembrance Day Service and laying of wreaths is scheduled for the cenotaph at the Ninth Line Legion hall Tuesday at 10.45 a.m. Refreshments will be served in the hall following the service. Everyone is welcome.

The legion's ladies auxiliary hosts its Remembrance Day tea, bake show and craft show Saturday.

The event goes from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the hall.

All proceeds go to veterans' welfare.

A light lunch is available. Admission is free.

For more information, call 905-640-3272 for 905-640-3604.

### Celebration of Arts winner sings at schools' concert

The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville bursary winner at last month's YRMG Celebration of the Arts concert will be back on stage tomorrow night.

A.J. de Boer, 13, will perform at Friday's Student Music Scholarship Concert at Stouffville District Secondary School.

Seven local schools will be represented by choirs and bands in the 16th annual show.

The event, sponsored by St. James Presbyterian Church in Stouffville, has raised \$57,000 for music programs in local schools.

The show begins at 7:30 p.m.

## SOUND OFF

Have something to say about these or other stories?

E-mail us at [jmason@yrmg.com](mailto:jmason@yrmg.com)

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 A circular portrait of a woman, Karen, smiling.