

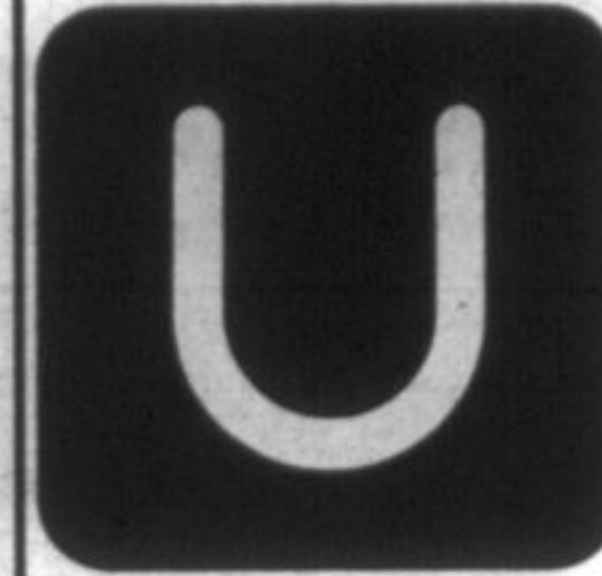


Staff Photo: Sandra Bolan

SHOPPING SPREE WINNER

Stouffville's Debb Ryder (left) was presented with \$800 in Stouffville Bucks by Stouffville Sun-Tribune sales representative Janice Bannon (right). Ms Ryder won the first-ever Stouffville Shopping Spree contest, which netted her the cash in gift certificates that can be used at any of the contest's participating merchants.

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Saturday, January 3rd

Infrastructure plans good news for all municipalities

BY DAVID FLEISCHER
Staff Writer

In this economic downturn, you might ask if we can afford to build the new infrastructure we need. The real question is, can we afford not to?

All around us are ambitious plans for subways, roads and other components of building a growing region and all that ambition comes with a hefty price tag.

The good news is the best investment is in infrastructure, according to a report from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

"The fact is the study came out and said this is the way to go and the federal government was listening," Richmond Hill Regional Councillor Brenda Hogg said. Ms Hogg is York's representative with the federation, which represents local governments across Canada.

It also may be reassuring to local taxpayers watching the region approve a \$1 billion capital budget for 2009.

"It's not a new thing. We're not inventing anything," federation president Jean Perrault said, adding government spending spurred the economy in the 1930s and 40s.

The report was commissioned by the federation from Informetrica, an Ottawa economic research firm, last June. It was updated last month, taking the economy's downturn into account.

It says each \$1 billion the government spends on infrastructure creates 11,000 jobs, half of which are in the construction sector.

It also says infrastructure spending is a better economic stimulus than personal tax cuts.

While that idea might raise the ire of tax-cut-loving Conservative governments, the idea struck a chord at the federal level, with the prime minister promising to cut red tape holding back \$3 billion of the Build Canada Fund.

It was a promise made after a November meeting with the first ministers and reiterated in the Nov. 19 throne speech.

"Public infrastructure is vital not only to create jobs for today, but also to create the links between communities and regions to help generate jobs for the future," Governor General Michaëlle Jean said.

"This is something we were waiting for and we're very pleased with the statement," Mr. Perrault said.

Mr. Perrault, the mayor of Sherbrooke, Que., said his own municipal budget has projects ready to move forward as soon as federal funding comes through.

Part of an overall \$33-billion plan, the Build Canada Fund required each province and territory to negotiate its own framework. While some finalized those agreements more than a year ago, Ontario's was not done until July.

The Spadina subway extension was the only local project affected and those funds are now in place.

Richmond Hill is getting closer to building a new town hall — at a cost of at least \$80 million — and while that may seem absurd in these tough times, it's worth remembering the Hoover Dam, Empire State

See MAJOR PROJECTS, page 12.

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