

Mother Nature pounds town's snow budget

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weather gods and global warming every time we put on our winter battle fatigues, some are worshipping the snowblowers they managed to get their hands on.

"We saw a huge demand right from mid-September. As soon as they were here, they started to fly" out of the store, Stefan Bortolossi, manager of Stouffville's Canadian Tire said.

The retailer sold out of all its snowblowers in the third week of December, despite a 20-per-cent increase in inventory.

"People remember how bad it was last year," Mr. Bortolossi said.

While you are out of luck when it comes to getting your hands on a snowblower, unless you have a neighbour nice enough to lend you his this winter, the retailer still has lots of electric snow throwers in stock, but they are only good for small areas and small amounts of snow.

If in a futile attempt to live in denial you have used your 4x4 truck to carve a path through your driveway so you can get in and out, it may be time to wake up to reality and use your shovel, or in many cases, actually buy one.

When shopping for shovels, which are still available at many area retailers, buy one that is ergonomic with an aluminum shaft because "they enable people to stay more upright when shovelling" and they're lighter, Mr. Bortolossi noted.

The ergonomic shovels cost between \$20 and \$35 on average.

If opening your wallet to pay for a shovel is like trying to break into Fort Knox, the cost of a standard shovel can be as little as \$10. So go ahead, part with the 10-spot, it will help you survive the remaining months of winter a little easier.

If you are just so fed up with the whole concept of snow blowing, shovelling and trudging along the sidewalk, but can't afford a trip to the sunny south for the next six months, you can always hire a snow plow company, although they're so busy it might be tough to find one.

"We've been going pretty much non-stop," said Kerry Keller, a partner in Prime Time Services. "It's not letting up."

The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville's public works department has used 50-per-cent more man-hours clearing snow this winter compared to the same time last year.

"I don't have the final number for 2008, but needless to say, we'll be over budget," said director of public works Paul Whitehouse. "Mother Nature is not letting up on us; she's not going to break us, but maybe our budget."

So far this season, which runs from mid-November to mid-April, the municipality has responded to 44 storm events. A storm event is a "call out to do maintenance, not necessarily a blizzard," Mr. Whitehouse explained.

There were 74 snow events during the 2007-2008 season.

The town normally cleans the Main Street snow banks twice a year. So far, the work has been done four times this season, accord-

Weather can play havoc with hockey playoffs

Hockey is played indoors this century, but that doesn't make it immune from weather.

The Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association scheduled 94 games during a 10-day period starting last weekend. It's the start of the Ontario Minor Hockey Association's three-month playdowns. Sixteen of the association's 18 Clipper rep teams are involved. The two youngest teams, the tykes, play area playoffs that begin later.

Sunday's storm didn't cancel any games, but one blizzard can wreak havoc on travel and schedules. All available ice has been rented to squeeze in the games.

"It will be a lot easier when the new twin-pad arena opens a year from now," said WSMHA administrator Charlene Mason.

The new rinks are under construction on Weldon Road between the old Sobey's store and Stouffville District Secondary School. The \$24-million project also includes a fire hall.

Stouffville Clipper teams won a town-record three OMHA A championships last year.

For playoff schedules, go to omha.net/play-downs/ For more on Stouffville minor hockey, go to wsmha.com

ing to Mr. Whitehouse.

In an effort to help keep home safe in case of an emergency, the Whitchurch-Stouffville Fire and Emergency Service wants to ensure everyone — homeowners and businesses — keep fire hydrants clear.

"By keeping hydrants clear in your neighbourhood (it) will allow firefighters to do their job effectively when seconds count," Jeff Bignell, the municipality's fire prevention officer said.

While drivers, pedestrians and home owners curse the snow, the operators of Dagmar Ski Resort and its patrons are all smiles.

"Our ski season is going great," Dagmar's office administrator Christine Lum said.

Dagmar, like other GTA ski hills, can typically build a base of snow that, combined with some assistance from Mother Nature, enables them to open a few runs on weekends right before Christmas.

This season, however, Dagmar made some snow in November and December but had half of its runs open on weekends as of Nov. 22.

"With the snow, we're supposed to get this week, we're thinking we're not going to have to make any more," Ms Lum said, noting the resort has a 105-cm base on its hills, most of which is all natural.

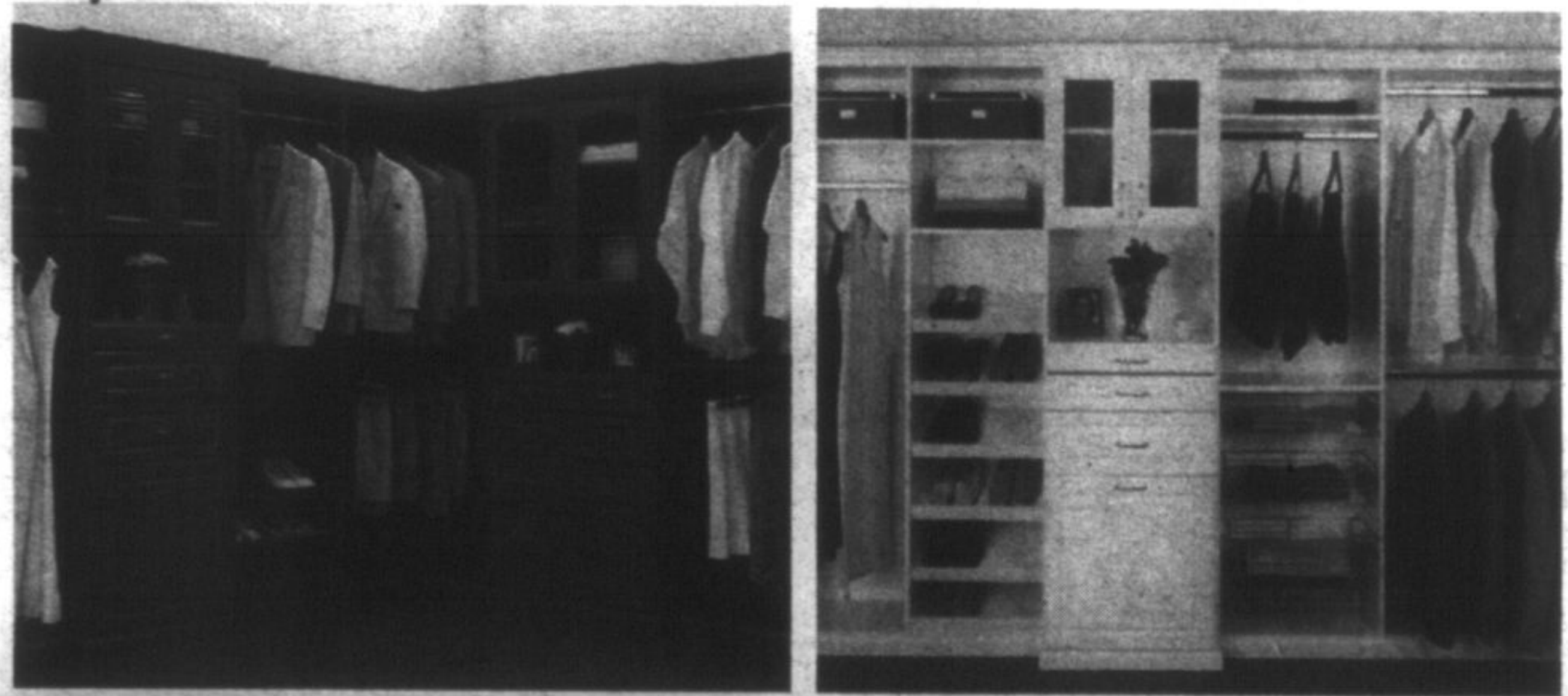
- With files from Torstar News Service

Some people embrace snow. Charlson Navaranjah, 5, takes a tumble on the Stouffville Memorial Park slope as he slides down with his brother Arason, 11, a Stouffville Sun-Tribune carrier, Saturday.

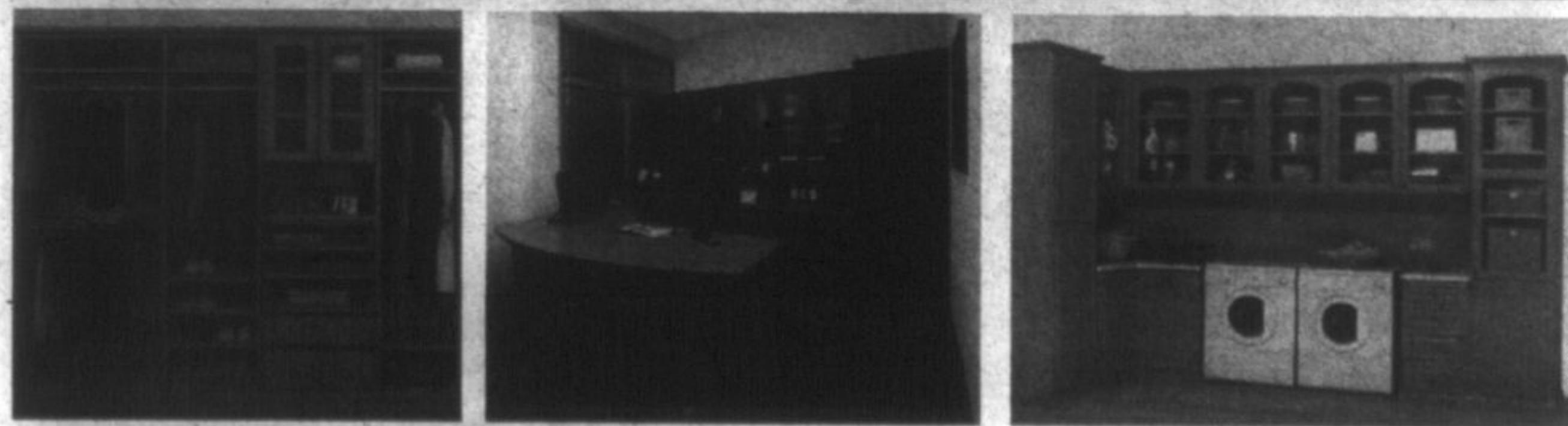


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