

Community needs leaders, police chief says

From page 3.

trucks gleaming in the sunshine on its lot are on the west side. Further south, northeast of Old Kennedy and Steeles, is a service station. A billboard advertises townhomes for about \$389,000.

The epicentre of Milliken now is the Kennedy and Denison area, near the high school and community centre.

The low-rise plazas housing fast food joints, a barber shop and Asian groceries along Kennedy act as a buffer between the street and single family homes, most with a car or two in the driveway.

It is a scene unimagined by Norman Milliken, a Loyalist from New Brunswick, who settled in the area in 1807 to supply lumber to the British Navy, according to the book *Markham 1793-1900*.

LONGTIME LANDOWNERS

The neighbourhood derives its name from the Milliken clan, which owned a substantial amount of property, Lorne Smith, Markham's official historian, says.

The heart of the village was the general store and post office operated by George and Sarah Prentice, Mr. Smith says. In the early 1900s, the telephone arrived and was operated out of that general store.

Keith Daunt, who lives just east of the Highgate Drive and Birchmount area, has been a resident of the neighbourhood for about 30 years. When they arrived in the early 1980s from Agincourt in Toronto, there was nothing, he says, adding neighbourhood schools were a collection of portables.

But close proximity to Toronto transit and amenities made up for it, he says.

"It was a lot more welcoming in Markham than in Scarborough," he says.

"Most of the residents are stable. We feel safe here."

But the community has not been without its difficulty. Just south of Mr. Daunt's home, York Regional Police Det.-Const. Robert Plunkett died in the line of duty in 2007.

This past February, employee Chun Kit "Daniel" Cheong, 26, of Toronto was shot once in the head while working at XSITE Cell Phones inside Pacific Mall.

And, in May 2007, Long "Owen" Sha, 19, of Whitby and a Richmond Hill man were attacked and beaten by a group of men packing two handguns and microphones at MHQ Karaoke Box at the mall.

But public safety concerns are no more prevalent in Milliken than any other developed neighbourhood in the region, York Regional Police Chief Armand La Barge says.

By working closely and establishing partnerships with residents and cultural groups representing people in the African-Canadian, Tamil-Canadian and Chinese-Canadian communities, among others in Milliken, police have and hope to identify community leaders, Chief La Barge says.

"We think that is a good way to enhance community safety," he says.

"It's a great community because it is such a diverse community. You can have such an extremely diverse area with shared values but not shared roots."

One such-community leader is Emily Peng.

Inside the Milliken Mills Community Centre, Ms Peng gives her full attention to a woman at the library.

As people approach her, she flawlessly switches languages.

"Personally, I really like dealing with people," says Ms Peng, a library settlement worker.

Ms Peng, who emigrated from China about three years ago, says she experienced difficulty with some aspects of settling into a new life in Canada.

Almost every day she encounters people in the community experiencing problems.

"I have the passion and the sympathy," Ms Peng says.

"The problem is not employment — it's stress. They come in with a high education and they have no way to find the information."

Approaching people as they walk through the stacks of books, Ms Peng says she asks if they are comfortable conversing in Mandarin or Cantonese and then tells them about marriage, nutrition and employment workshops.

"Without passion, you can't do this work," she says.

Down the road, Nazia Chaudhry is working the telephone in her office in a plaza on Kennedy Road just north of Denison.

Ms Chaudhry, walks briskly to a colleague's desk to relay some information before stopping for a moment in the boardroom of the Centre for Information and Community Services.

The building is the agency's York Region immigrant centre.

Her specialty is assisting South Asian families and seniors with family and settlement issues, made all the easier by her ability to converse in Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi.

"This location is very close to the pockets of South Asian people," she says. "Some can just walk here."

LOOKING FOR HELP

The people who do walk into the office are often looking for employment assistance, sponsorship and immigration issues and even figuring out auto insurance, she says. If it's really urgent, she'll assist with resumes and cover letters.

These days, many inquiries are flowing in about subsidized housing.

While seeking job leads and services in her new homeland, Ms Chaudhry encountered dead-ends and some frustration.

So she knows well that some of the people who come to see her, while educated and family-oriented, are experiencing a shock — both cultural and religious.

"It's very hard work, but at the end of the day, if you help someone and they are successful, that's the payback," Ms Chaudhry says.

Councillor Alex Chiu, a Chinese-Canadian, represents the Markham municipal ward that encompasses Milliken.

He moved to Markham in 1981.

Looking ahead a decade or two, Councillor Chiu wants to see Old Kennedy as the focal point for mixed-use shopping and some residential development.

"It will be our own downtown," he says. Competing with Unionville however, would be like "fighting a giant," he says with a laugh.

But a revitalized downtown would be welcome news to Mr. Daunt, who has seen his community change for the better the past 30 years.

"It has become home."



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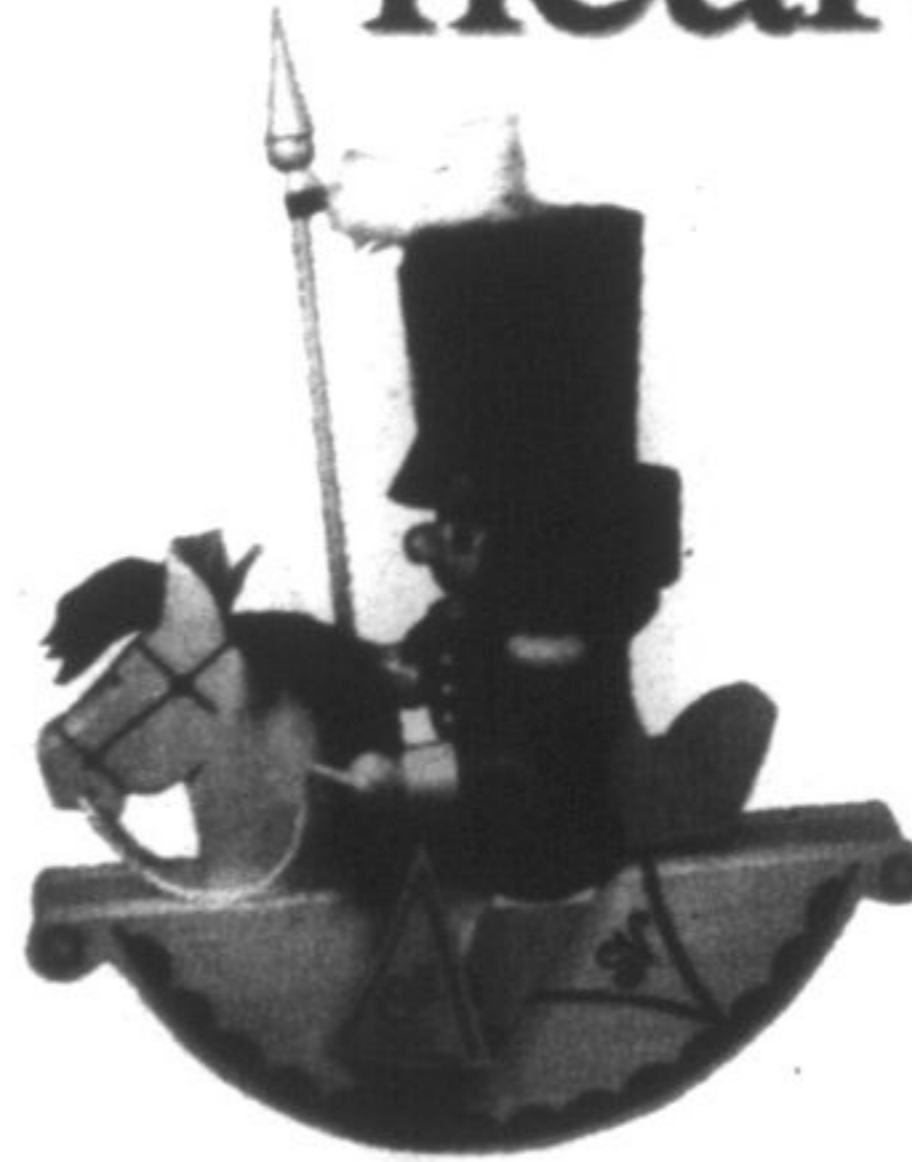
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