

EDITORIAL

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**LETTERS
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The Sun-Tribune welcomes your letters. All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The Sun-Tribune reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space.

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OPINION

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Editorial

HST, elections come with 2010

Happy New Year?
Maybe.

So, just what will 2010 have in store for us?:

- If you aren't familiar with the acronym HST, you will be.

Slated to take effect this July in Ontario, the new harmonized sales tax (HST) will shift responsibility of the PST from industry to consumers, adding an additional 8 per cent to the cost of everything from buying a house to ordering pizza.

Premier Dalton McGuinty says he will make the blended tax consumer friendly. There are some good signs. Rebates will be available on lower-end homes. The Canadian Automobile Dealers Association says car prices will drop thanks to the streamlined tax.

Mr. McGuinty better get this one right. The next provincial election isn't until 2011, but voters won't likely forget the health care scandals and HST if it doesn't go their way.

- There will be at least one election this year. Voters will elect mayors, municipal councils and school board trustees Oct. 25.

Political hot spots in York Region move around like a game of musical chairs. Markham, King, Georgina and Whitchurch-Stouffville had their day. Now, the headlines over disharmony and ethics come out of Vaughan and Aurora.

Here's a New Year's resolution: attend a municipal council meeting. Few do, until they are forced to by a neighbourhood problem or larger issue.

- We know the economy is showing signs of coming out of its recession, but there's that record-high \$56-billion federal deficit.

Look for spending cuts when Finance Minister Jim Flaherty introduces a budget in March. Speaking of taxes, might the Tories revisit its cut to the GST to raise more money? They may have some to time work with this one. For the first time in recent memory, the Liberals aren't threatening to force an election.

- They won't help immediately, but two large projects will proceed this year and should pay handsome dividends by the middle of the new decade.

The extension of the Spadina subway line into Vaughan should take many more vehicles off our roads and offer new service to residents of the region.

A ground-breaking for the 8.6-kilometre extension took place last month and the line is set to open in 2015.

The \$400-million redevelopment that will see Markham Stouffville Hospital more than double its capacity by 2014 is making progress. Shovels should be in the ground next fall.



Letters to the Editor

Legacy of Olympic torch relay lives on at Games, schools

What a great experience for our town to have the Olympic torch relay pass through our streets.

It was so inspiring to see the community out in full force, wearing their red and white and cheering on the torch runners.

It was a great display of support for the Olympics and of community spirit.

We had no idea what to expect in terms of numbers and the corner of Church and Main was a sea of excited onlookers.

I had to hold my camera up high to get a shot of the procession over all the heads in front of me. I understand the rest of the way along Main Street was just as busy.

An event of this size cannot happen without help and we had a great response to our call for volunteers. In true Whitchurch-Stouffville fashion, members of our community came forward eager to help and be a part of the exciting day.

I would like to offer a big thank you to all our volunteers, from the town crier in the horse and buggy on Main (Marcel Bossi, Justin Altmann and Conrad Black) to the flag bearers outside in the cold, which included local service clubs and organizations, to the many who helped inside the Lebovic Centre for Arts and Entertainment Nineteen on the Park, to the Olympians themselves, Karen Cockburn, Mike Harris and Irene van Fleet.

We had great support for what turned out to be a wonderful day.

A special thank you to the committee who worked on making this an extra special day in our town,

HAVE YOUR SAY, STOUFFVILLE

► What do you think of these issues or others? E-mail letters to the editor to
jmason@yrmg.com

Heather Andrews, Scott Clubine, Rebecca Mustard, Ruth Leblanc, Steven Foster, Linda Mainprize and Kym Pyke.

The excitement will continue as volunteers and councillors go out to visit local schools with Olympic videos and an opportunity for students to have their picture taken with our official Olympic torch, still sporting soot from the flame. Thank you, Sun-Tribune reporter Sandy Bolan.

Everyone is invited to come out to Nineteen on the Park to watch the Olympics Live in February and don't forget to have a look at the torch on display at the box office.

Thank you, everyone, for making the day a special one for us all.

All the schools in town came out for this event and I am sure all the children left with great memories and Olympic dreams.

Only 43 more days until the flame reaches Vancouver to begin the games.

MICOLE ONGMAN
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You can read letters, columns and stories from The Sun-Tribune at yorkregion.com



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

Happy holidays? Not for all of us, Stouffville

The standard holiday greeting we spew out every December is not one-size-fits-all.

Not everyone is allowed to have a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

One of our family's traditions involves loading up the SUV for Christmas Eve service at our church, followed by a tour of the entries in The Sun-Tribune/Stouffville Lions holiday decorating contest.

Post church last Thursday, we nibbled on cookies, got lost in a new subdivision and soaked in the lights and December snow. We remembered when we had to load the kids into car seats instead of wondering which one would take over the driver's seat.

But it wasn't all large laughs. Maybe I've been doing this job in this once small town for too many decades. We drove past too many houses I know are hurting.

Too many people have been taken from their families and communities far too early, leaving scars for relatives and friends to deal with for the rest of their lives.

They were teenagers and young parents killed in accidents involving cars and recreational vehicles, in workplace mishaps or by disease.

A few more were taken from us in 2009. They are remembered on bumper stickers, tattoos and tombstones featuring their names. They are in many heavy hearts, too.

It's no wonder there's a growing number of "Blue Christmas" services for the survivors.

Count your blessings. Remember your neighbours during these holidays.

It's not all bright lights and good times.

Jim Mason is editor of The Sun-Tribune.