

NEWS: Tremor moves couch in Ballantrae, boosts emergency calls across region

Quake shakes Whitchurch-Stouffville homes, offices

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It was anything but a regular Wednesday afternoon for people across York Region.

Long-time Sharon resident Lynn Lewis was working at home yesterday when the dishes on her counter began to vibrate. She was convinced, at first, it was a large truck passing by.

But when her three cats and dog began to look frightened and the sound of the rattling plates grew louder, she thought earthquake.

"This is the first time I have felt something that actually scared me," she said. "I

have never thought of being prepared for an earthquake because I don't expect it up here."

Ballantrae resident Nancy DiGiovanni admits she wouldn't know what to do in the case of an earthquake either, but will be looking into it in after today's experience.

"I thought I was feeling ill at first," she said. "But the pictures on the walls began to move and our heavy leather couch moved across the floor."

She said she is prepared for a fire and medical emergency, however, she never expected she would have to have a plan

what to do in the event of an earthquake.

The ground shook for about 10 seconds at about 1:45 p.m., said Science North staff scientist Amy Henson, who confirmed the 5.5-magnitude quake was centred on the Ontario-Quebec border and tremors were felt across Ontario and parts of the United States.

"(Ottawa) is part of a seismic area and small quakes are common," she said. "But ones of this magnitude happen once every decade."

Mayor Wayne Emmerson felt it from his fourth-floor office in Stouffville's Imperial Centre.

Residents called The Sun-Tribune from across the municipality.

Fire chief Rob McKenzie said there were no emergency calls in Whitchurch-Stouffville related to the quake.

The centre had reports of tremors from as far as Timmins and she explained Eastern Ontario is a unique region in that earthquakes are felt a greater distance, 500 km or more compared to the smaller spread of those in western Ontario.

"Earthquakes happen when two areas of rock that have a split shift, slip, rub or crash together," she said, but wasn't immediately able to confirm this happened yesterday. "But it happened 15 km underground and the weather has nothing to do with."

The only damage she expected to see was to some of the structures within 40 to 50 km of the epicentre.

York Regional Police received 22 emergency calls regarding the quake and noticed a small spike in 911 calls that had no voice

contact, according to Const. Rebecca Boyd.

However Central York Fire Services received just one related call, platoon Chief Dan Palmer said.

"There was one call and even that was only because it was the business' policy to pull the alarm if something like that happens," he said. "That's all we've had."

York Region Chairperson Bill Fisch, who was in a Police Services Board meeting at the time the tremor struck, said he had not heard any reports of damage across the region.

"It looks like it was a relatively minor earthquake here in York Region," he said.

He said he felt the quake shake the region's headquarters.

The region headquarters building in Newmarket was not evacuated but the South Service Centre in Richmond Hill near Yonge Street and Hwy. 407 was, Mr. Fisch said.

Richmond Hill resident Helen Shulist, 61, who was also in the regional building when the quake hit, described the tremor like jarring awake while falling asleep.

"I just thought it was something to do with the building, that it was shifting," she said. "I didn't think about an earthquake until they mentioned it."

While large-scale earthquakes are rare in southern Ontario, smaller ones may be more common than you think.

The Southern Ontario Seismic Network reported dozens of earthquakes throughout the region between 1992 and 2009. Most occurred in clusters, the largest being the western Quebec seismic zone near Ottawa.

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All school specials (400 series) will be suspended effective Tuesday, June 29th for the summer and will resume in September.

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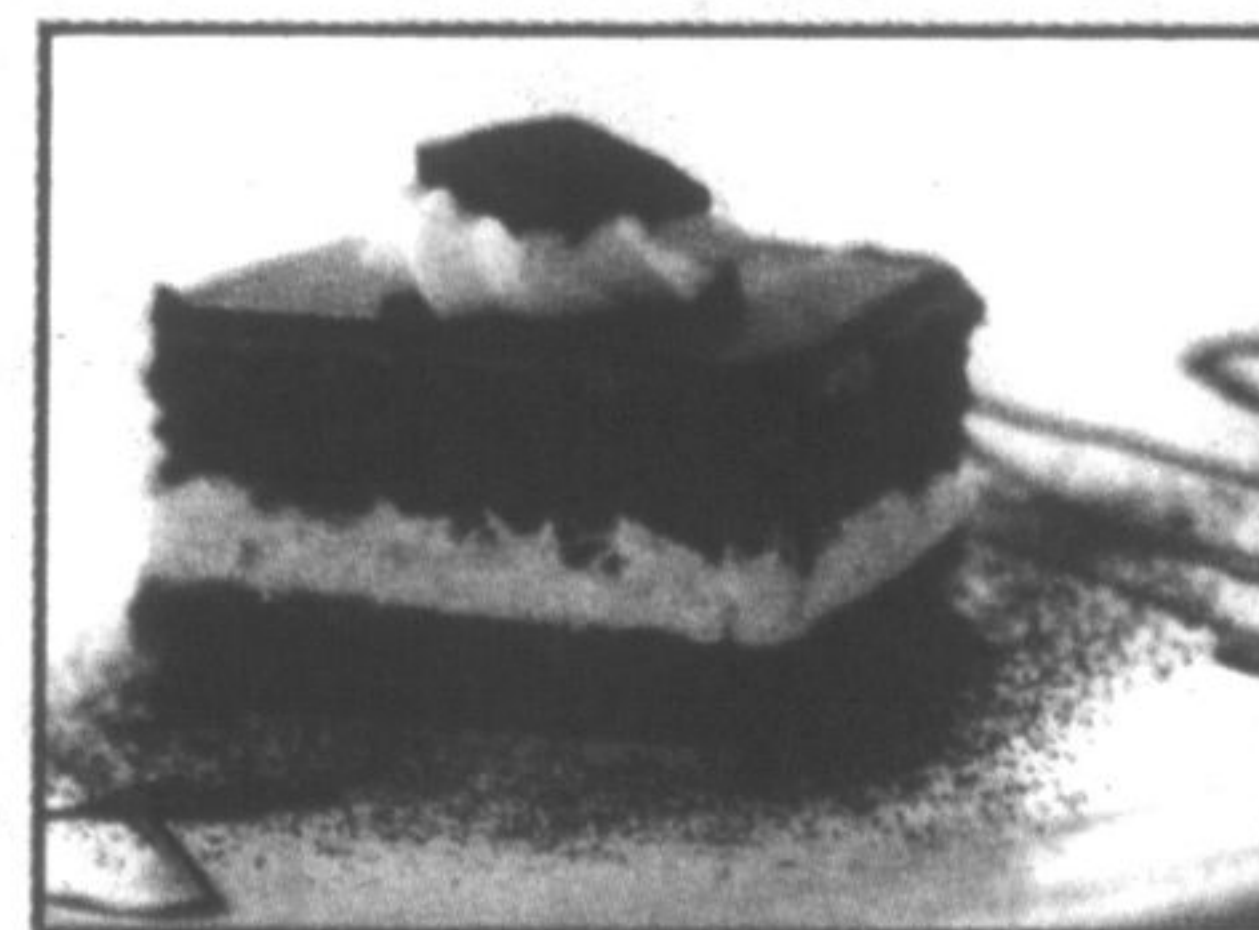
- Canada Day - Thursday, July 1**
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