

WELLNESS: Service animals allowed entry by law

Restaurant ouster has dog's family speaking out

3, Stouffville Sun-Tribune ■ Thursday, July 1, 2010

BY SANDRA BOLAN
sbolan@yrmg.com

JAIME AND BELLA'S STORY

Jim Lytle only wanted to take his two children out for breakfast one Sunday morning while his wife was out.

The three of them, along with Bella, daughter Jaime's service dog, headed over to their regular breakfast joint, the Fickle Pickle, but there was a lineup. Instead of making his twin 11-and-a-half-year-olds and Bella wait, Mr. Lytle decided to try the restaurant next door - the Main Course.

The family was quickly seated by the waitress, who according to Mr. Lytle, said Bella's presence would not be a problem. However, a few minutes later she returned to the family's table to inform them another employee requested they leave because of Bella.

"She was obviously upset," Mr. Lytle said of the waitress. "She apologized a bunch of times."

The family quietly left and headed to another eatery that has welcomed the whole family before - Famous Sam's in Gormley.

"I'm not a guy to fly off the handle. I was a bit surprised. But there are people out there who don't understand. That's pure education," Mr. Lytle said. "They're trained to be a companion. They won't have accidents on the floor."

According to Guide to the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07, "a person is permitted to be accompanied by his or her guide dog or other service animal in the areas of (businesses) that are open to the public or third parties."

'OWNER APOLOGETIC'

"The dog and the person should be looked at as one. They shouldn't be looked at as two separate entities," said Heather Andrews, chairperson of the town's accessibility advisory committee.

A witness notified the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville and Nancy Cronsberry, senior municipal law enforcement officer, spoke to the owner of the Main Course about it.

"(The owner) was very apologetic," Ms Cronsberry said. "It was a worker; they just didn't know, didn't understand."

"They made it clear to me this was not going to happen again. They understand it now."

The Sun-Tribune tried to contact the Main Course owner but was unsuccessful. Messages were not returned. The restaurant was closed for renovations early this week.

Since January, when Bella joined the Lytle household, they have been welcomed everywhere, until recently.

On Tuesday, Deborah Lytle, her two children and Bella, along with some other mothers and their children, headed to Cedar Beach for an afternoon of fun.

While Jaime was swimming in the lake, Bella was dipping her toes into the water, while being

Jaime Lytle was diagnosed with autism at age six.

"She crawled at the right time. She walked at the right time, she just never talked," Mrs. Lytle said late last year when the family was awarded a \$9,000 grant from the President's Choice Children's Charity through Stouffville's Nofrills store to help pay for a service dog.

An autism service dog is specifically bred for the purpose and must have certain characteristics, in particular, the dog must be calm. If a dog passes early tests, it then undergoes four to five months of specialized training at Autism Dog Services in Lynden, Ont.

On Jan. 9, Bella joined the Lytle family.

"She became a friend, a companion. People with autism have social anxieties, don't have a lot of friends outside of school," Mrs. Lytle said.

In just a few months, Bella has helped Jaime overcome some of her anxieties, such as getting her height and weight checked at the doctor's office.

"I can do this because I have my dog with me," Mrs. Lytle said of Jaime's newfound confidence.

Shopping has also become enjoyable.

"When we go shopping, she used to hate it. (She would) ride in the cart. Now, she walks with the dog," Mrs. Lytle said.

held on her leash, according to Mrs. Lytle.

A woman took exception to Bella, who was not wearing her service jacket and requested the dog be removed from the beach.

Mrs. Lytle said she explained Bella is a service dog. She pulled Bella out of the water, but the group remained on the beach.

"She wasn't doing any harm. She was on a leash."

Janet Davies, the owner of Cedar Beach Park, was the woman who spoke to Mrs. Lytle.

"There would have been no problem if that service dog had its jacket on and was sitting beside the autistic person but it was romping through the water," Ms Davies said.

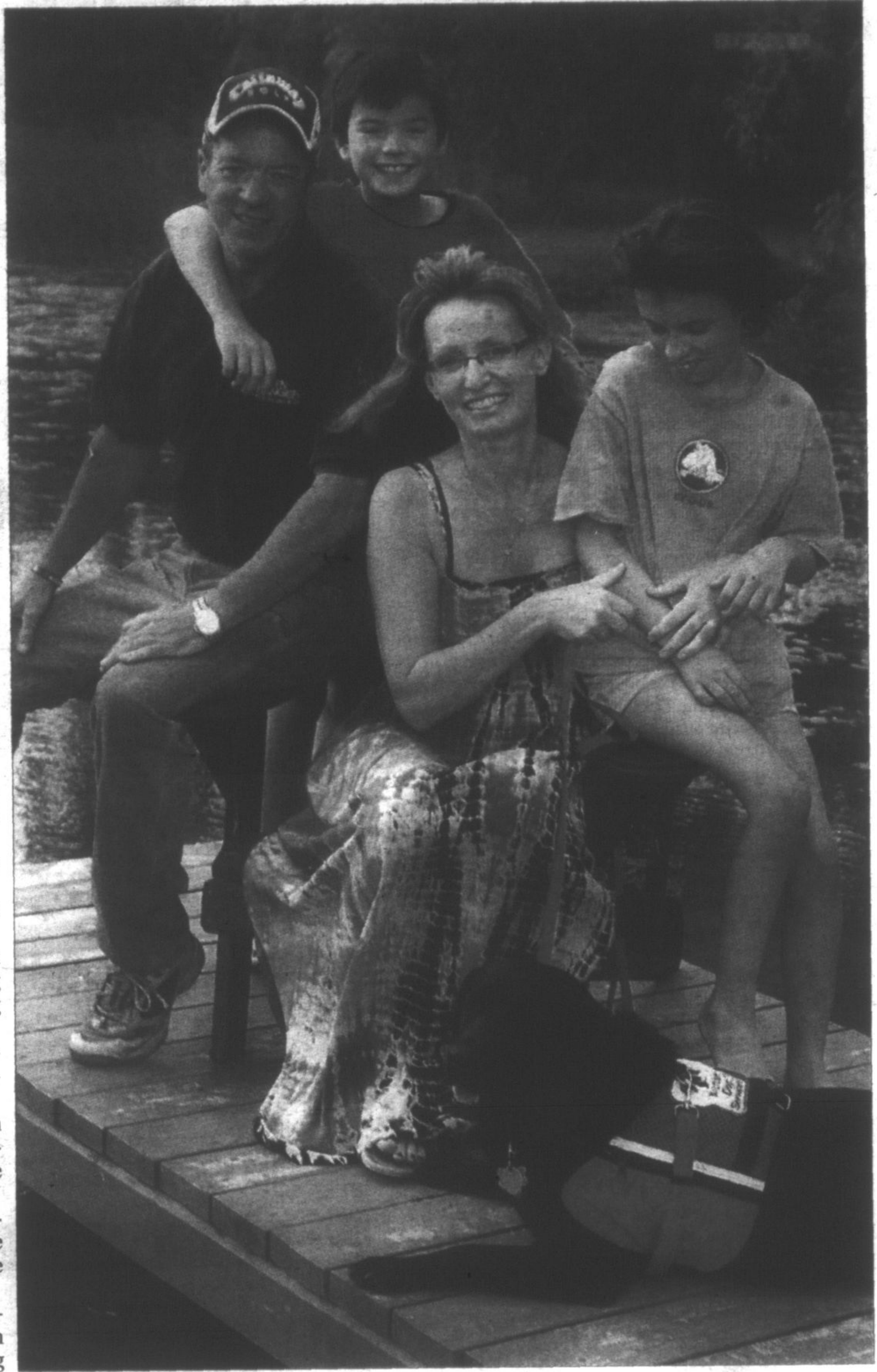
The Lytles are not the only ones to encounter the "your dog is not welcome here" sentiment.

A few years ago, Jim Brown entered Main Street's Country Style restaurant with his service dog but was requested they leave. The incident was eventually resolved.

"Everybody has to be educated on the subject," Mrs. Lytle said. "There has to be some kind of level of communication that everyone knows it's OK."

In an effort to help educate the community about service dogs, the Lytles, along with four other families associated with Autism Dog Services, will have a booth set up during the Strawberry Festival on Saturday.

At the booth, they will be selling dog cookies, jewelry and Glo Bears. All money raised will go to families raising money for the training of their autism dogs.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Jim, Spencer, 11, Deborah and Jaime Lytle, 11, and Bella the service dog at their home on Bethesda Road in Whitchurch-Stouffville. They'll be at the Strawberry Festival on Saturday talking about service dogs and their place in the community.

CELEBRATE
CANADA DAY
THURS. JULY 1 - 11AM TO 5PM
AT
PEPPERTREE KLASSICS
WOMEN'S FASHIONS, FOOTWEAR AND ACCESSORIES.

60%
OFF*

SUMMER
FASHION
AND
SHOES



*REG PRICES *ALL SALES FINAL *ONE DAY ONLY!

137 MAIN STREET NORTH, MARKHAM · 905-294-3882 · WWW.PEPPERTREE.CA