

# Councillor, trustee have felt sting of mudslinging

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mailed this summer to Stouffville media outlets, including The Sun-Tribune, detailing alleged conflicts of interest and illegal campaign financing by Mr. Emmerson.

Some of the claims, centring on donations received during the 2006 election campaign, were dismissed by municipal officials 20 months ago.

Mr. Emmerson is also accused of purchasing two homes from a developer at rock-bottom prices in exchange for favouritism.

Not so, he told The Sun-Tribune.

"Everything I've done is above board and always has been above board and I am not, will not, cause this municipality any disgrace," Mr. Emmerson said in an interview.

Mr. Emmerson received a copy of the package himself.

"I've worked hard for this municipality," he said. "What we have accomplished in my personal life is personal and it has nothing to do with where I sit. Now ... the lawyers are looking at it."

His legal team, however, has hit a stumbling block. The source of the package and its contents, so far, remain anonymous.

The Sun-Tribune package came in a brown envelope with no return address and a downtown Toronto postmark.

Over the past few weeks, more of these packages have been sent to council incumbents and other candidates, again with no return address or signature.

Mayoral candidates Justin Altmann and Christine Vlachos received packages in the mail, with Stouffville postmarks. The other candidate, Sue Sherban, said the package was dropped off at her house the day after nominations closed, Sept. 11.

Mr. Emmerson is not, however, the only person who has had to fend off personal attacks during election campaigns.

Phil Bannon, who is running for a third term as councillor of Ward 2, has had to deal with deliberate untruths during municipal and provincial campaigns.

"It's very clear these people attack the incumbent because they don't have a campaign stand," said the

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Wayne Emmerson speaks at an election meeting at Stouffville Secondary last month. A package containing allegations against the mayor has been mailed to candidates and the media. All charges have been disproven or dismissed by the candidate.



STAFF PHOTO/NICK IWANYSHYN

# Mayor being 'stalked': prof

Wayne Emmerson is being stalked, according to an expert at a Toronto university.

"This is not a political attack, this is a personal attack," said Alan Middleton, assistant professor of marketing at the Schulich School of Business at York University.

Mr. Middleton called the tactic "stalking" and part of a "well thought-out campaign".

The information is out there being distributed and discussed in public, but because the source has not identified him or herself, "we shouldn't give it any credence", Mr. Middleton said. "It shouldn't be regarded with an ounce of credibility."

On the other hand, Mr. Middleton said the information won't necessarily be ignored by voters because it taps into a type of political voyeurism — although we want candidates to stick to the issues, we can't help but watch them attack each other.

Part of why candidates hit each other below the belt is because in municipal politics, there is very little difference between the candidates' platforms.

"When you have lack of differentiation, you try to reduce the credibility of your opponent," Mr. Middleton said. "It's harder to increase your credibility."

## 'WELL THOUGHT-OUT CAMPAIGN'

Does mudslinging actually have an effect on the eventual outcome of an election?

To some extent, yes, according to Mr. Middleton.

When it comes to voters, there are three types: those who know and like the candidate and his or her platform; those who know and like the opposition and his or her platform; and the people in the middle — who comprise the largest group of voters.

"They're listening for things to help them form their judgment," Mr. Middleton said.

When punches are being thrown by opponents and others, what is the best response?

If it's not "high-level noise", ignore it and it will go away, according to Mr. Middleton. But if you give the controversial remarks attention, the allegations gain some credence.

If you want to squash the situation, launch a counter-attack disputing the claims with your own hard data provided by a third-party source, he said.

Can an election be lost when allegations of corruption and other wrongdoings are swirling around a candidate?

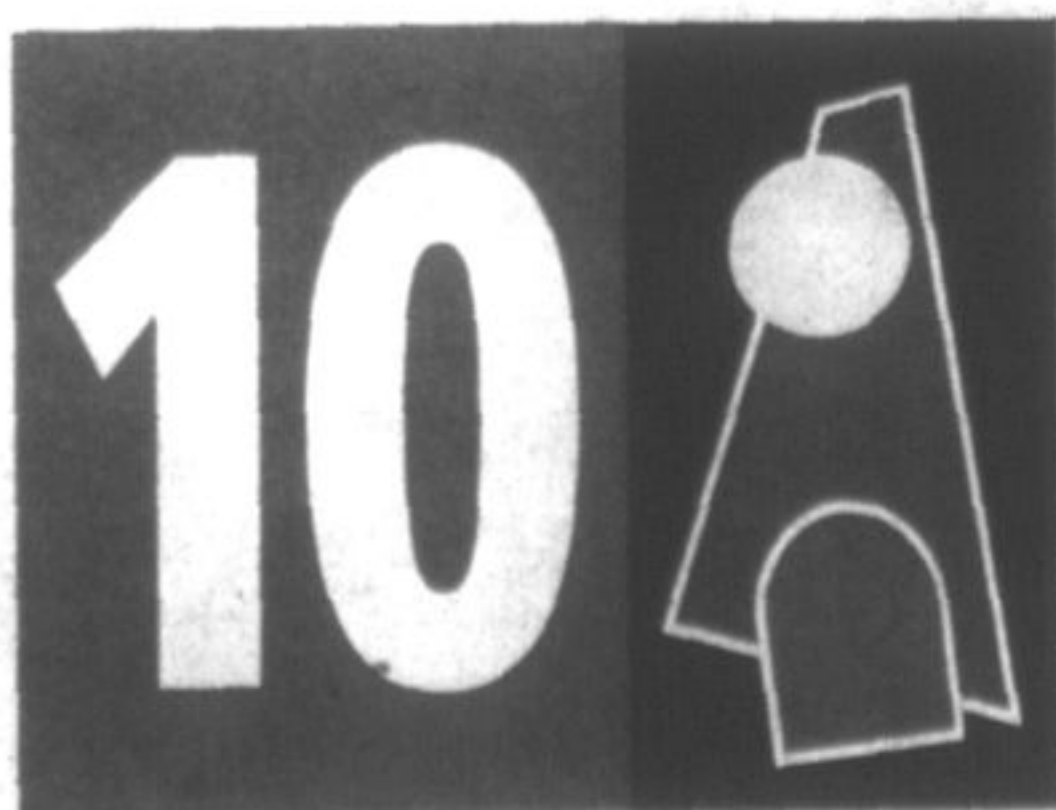
"There is a residual view all politicians are corrupt and looking for a deal," he said.

Although candidates in any election prefer to stick to the actual issues relating to governance of the municipality, province or country, leaving their personal lives out of the discussion can't be done.

"(It's) predictability about ethics and behaviour," the professor said.

One example Mr. Middleton cited is Conrad Black, who was caught cheating at Upper Canada College. "So when he was found guilty of defrauding his partners, it is consistent behaviour. Early behaviours and beliefs are predictive of later behaviours," he said.

— Sandra Bolan

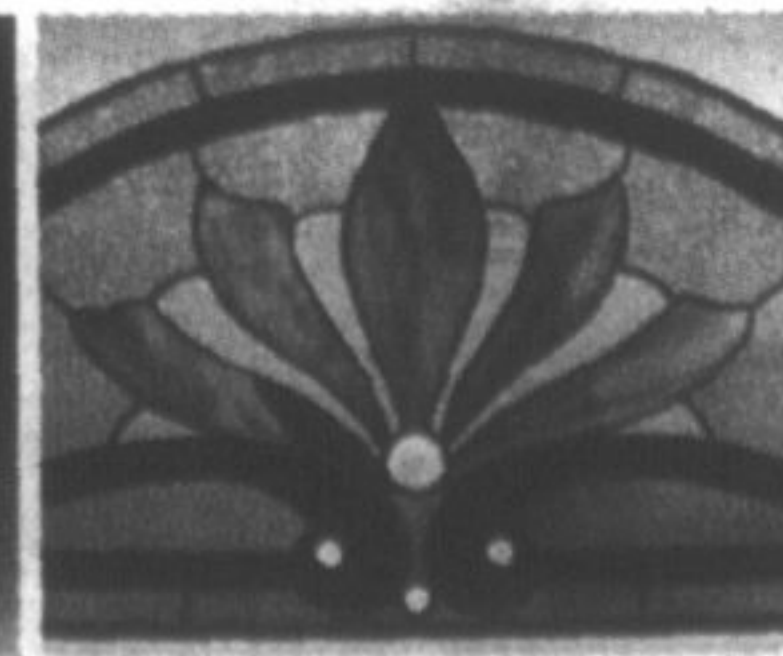
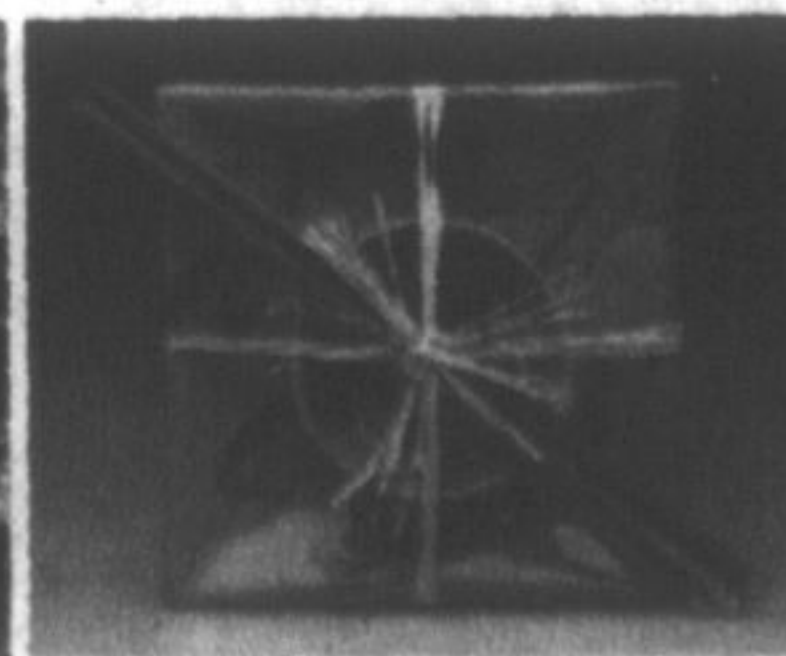


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