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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

**Stouffville Sun-Tribune**

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## Editorial

### More judges, courts will fix justice system

An ambitious — and often criticized — initiative to reduce the backlog at Ontario courts is starting to show results.

Yet with an aim of cutting the number of days and court appearances needed to complete a case by 30 per cent by next year, good may simply not be good enough.

The Newmarket courthouse, as well as others in Toronto's north end and London, ON, were chosen as sites for the 2008 launch of the efficiency program, dubbed Justice on Target. Through innovation, Newmarket, in particular, has achieved some solid benchmarks, much stronger than the provincial average.

In Newmarket, the number of days from first appearance to disposition for the average case has dropped by almost 20 per cent, while the average number of appearances to complete a case is down from 9.3 to 8.1 days.

However, it took longer last year to deal with several more serious offences, such as attempted murder, sexual assault, robbery and uttering threats.

Gains, meanwhile, have been made in break and enter, weapons and impaired driving cases.

Initiatives in Newmarket include a first appearance desk, which ensures those accused of a crime have all the information they need, including the Crown's position, before their first appearance.

It also allows those eligible for Direct Accountability, an alternative for those charged with minor property offences, to explore their options, often without having to see the inside of a courtroom.

This is on top of a list of seven other initiatives, from on-site legal aid to a new three-appearance pre-trial standard, that are part of the Justice on Target initiative at all participating court-houses.

While these changes have netted results, they haven't come close to achieving the mandated 30-per-cent reduction.

And despite the gains, regardless of how they've been achieved, there's one main factor that hasn't changed. While crime was down by about 5 per cent in York Region from 2008 to 2009, the number of charges before Newmarket courts has remained relatively constant. In 2008, there were 32,648 charges dealt with here. Last year, that figure was down to 32,087.

While it's good news the number of reported crimes in the region has dropped, our growing population may offset future drops, leaving our courthouse with the same burden.



## Letters to the Editor

### 'Dogs can really be dogs' in leash-free park

I live in Ballantrae and have two dogs that we regularly walk in the York Regional forests.

One of the reasons we moved to this community is because the forests are legally leash-free parks and we have always believed dogs were not meant to be on leashes.

We moved to this area about eight years ago and we love walking in the forests. I have noticed, however, that many people continue to walk their dogs on leashes and never give them the opportunity to be free.

After a recent meeting with Mark Riden and Brendan O'Sullivan, we decided to take our dogs to the Stouffville leash-free park.

I had been asked to work on a committee to expand the leash-free parks to the Ballantrae area and, although I was convinced I would never use any such park, I felt that to work on this committee, I should at least visit the park once.

I was in for a very pleasant surprise. Our young vizsla, only four months old, had an absolute ball. There were other dogs to run and play with — we often walk in the forests and never meet any other dogs.

The people we met were very friendly and all were very pleased with the park.

Everyone kept very close watch of what their dogs were doing and how they were behaving. Everyone cleaned up after their dogs. Everyone, even my senior dog, seemed to be enjoying themselves.

I think Mark and Brendan, their committees and the Stouffville Dog Owners Association have done a wonderful job and I hope that there were

### HAVE YOUR SAY, STOUFFVILLE

► What do you think of these issues or others? E-mail letters to the editor to [jmason@yrmg.com](mailto:jmason@yrmg.com)

be many more leash-free parks established so dogs can really be dogs.

ENID SANDERS  
BALLANTRAE

### Why can't town officials work with business people?

Re: Relax sign laws, town, letter to the editor by Graydon & Ainsley Card, Jan. 21.

It is with great interest to read the letters in The Sun-Tribune with complaints regarding the business sign bylaw in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

The high-priced bureaucrats in Stouffville want downtown business to improve, but they don't want to work with the people who pay them. Their attitude seems to be: "Just pay our salaries and do what we tell you."

Is it really hard to work with business people in town? Apparently it is. The issue has been alive for years.

Maybe, just maybe, we can get someone in public office who doesn't have tunnel vision and can work with business owners and taxpayers.

BILL BELL  
STOUFFVILLE

You can read letters, columns and stories from The Sun-Tribune on [yorkregion.com](http://yorkregion.com)



### Off The Top

with Jim Mason

### Nothing wrong with a little country

Mark me down as a big fan of "Country Close to the City", this town's much-maligned slogan.

Some of the larger minds at the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville think it's time for a change. We need something a little more Madison Avenue and a little less Ninth Line, they argue.

After all, how are we going to attract Canadian head offices to our place with visions of barns, out-houses and the movie *Deliverance* dancing around in the heads of corporate CAOs when they think Stouffville?

Horse feathers.

To quote the great Marie Osmond, we're still "a little bit country", city slickers.

And that's pretty darn cool. There's still some green space — although it's shrinking faster than the U.S. dollar — between here and Markham, Pickering, Aurora and Newmarket, those bigger burghs on our horizon.

It's the very thing differentiates us from most of the GTA.

And many of those newcomers who bought those thousands of new homes on Stouffville's outskirts during the last five years did so for the same reasons corporate Canada should be looking our way — we've got a nice mix of urban and rural going on here, neighbours.

My late golf partner, Eddie Lohr, he of CFRB/CHFI helicopter traffic reporting fame, moved here in the 1970s to get away from the very city he saw growing beneath him every day.

"The last small town left on the doorstep of Toronto," he'd say. "That's the appeal, Jimmy."

Still is, Eddie, still is for at least a little while longer.

Or Country Close to the City, as another expert so eloquently put it.

Still is.  
Jim Mason is editor of The Sun-Tribune.