

Director leaving on high 'note'

It's her last hurrah. On Wednesday, Dr. Margot Rejskind will direct Stouffville's Men of Note chorus for a very last time.

She'll wave her magic wand over the 40-member choir at the 23rd annual Music Festival in Stouffville United Church. The concert, marking the start of Strawberry Festival week, begins at 8 p.m.

A graduate of Concordia University and the University of Illinois, Dr. Rejskind was acquired by the Stouffville chorus eight years ago, guiding them to new heights in vocal excellence.

Previously, she served as an instructor at Toronto's Royal Conservatory of Music and the National Ballet.

She now resides with husband Richard and daughter Audrey in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. In September, she'll move to a new position as vocal instructor at the University of PEI.

June 26 is sure to be an evening filled with mixed emotions for both Dr. Rejskind and the choir. Chorus members will be visibly saddened by the fact their director's leaving but the farewell will be eased somewhat through their acceptance of the 2013 Music Town, Ontario award.

The presentation will take place mid-way through the concert. John Halse, a member of last year's winners, the Springvale Boys of Springvale Baptist Church, will do the honours. Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Wayne Emmerson will be in attendance, representing the town.

Long recognized as the community's music ambassadors, The Men of Note were first organized in 1999 by then-president Dave Duggan and director Doug Walker. The choir's subsequent director was Jeff McAloon. The group's first accompanist was John Mole followed by Linda Marcinkus, Murphy Hung,



Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

Courtney Britton and now Jennifer Orchanian.

Initial appearances occurred mainly in churches and retirement residences. At the turn of the century, however, they branched out, singing at a special Service of Remembrance under the shadow of the Canadian War Memorial at Vimy Ridge. France. Before returning home, they participated in a six-concert tour through England and Wales.

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In 2004, the choir travelled to Germany for a series of concerts near Munich. Three years later, they toured the Maritimes, a trip that included a stopover at the legendary coffee house then operated by the late Rita McNeil.

"That trip was the very best," Dr. Rejskind would say later.

Their last overseas tour of duty occurred in August 2010 when they visited Eire and Northern Ireland.

Seven concerts were part of a busy schedule.

Chorus repertoire spans everything from sacred to spirituals; folk tunes to popular. "A subtle mixture of baritone and tenor voices, underscored by the richness of resonant bass," is the way choir past-president Vince Parry describes their range.

They've completed three CDs, their last in 2009 entitled *Home for the Holidays*. It was recorded at Stouffville's Christ Church Anglican.

Susan Ryman, commonly referred to as a Lady of Note and an established soloist with the chorus, will open Wednesday's concert with the beautiful selection Precious Memories. She will also combine with Dr. Rejskind in a duet entitled Flying Free.

Violin virtuoso, Matthew Feuwes will perform during the free-will offering. Net proceeds will go to the student music scholarship fund. Donations of groceries will also be received for the Whitchurch-Stouffville Food Bank.

Over the past 22 years, 28 individuals or groups have received the Music Town, Ontario award, including: Lorne Boadway and Jim Rehill (1991); Clarion Baker and Jean Hammond (1992); Alma Oldham and The Wright Family (1993); Bertha Stouffer and Julia Topping (1994); David Boyd (1995); Lawnie Wallace (1996); Jean Thomas (1997); Kathi Phillips (1998); Doris Harvey (1999); Anne Gage (2000); Gary Burke and Vince Parry (2001); David and Sharon Baxter (2002); Wanda Stride (2003); Wayne Hill (2004); Laurie D'Alessandro (2005); David Duggan (2006); Pat Wild (2007); Susan Brown (2008); Lloyd Knight (2009); Don Quarles and Family (2010); Bob Davies (2011) and The Springvale Boys (2012).

Jim Thomas, a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years, is an organizer of Wednesday's concert.

Small-business advice Jerry Seinfeld style

In the 24th episode of Seinfeld, Jerry desperately wants to help the owner of a failing restaurant in his New York City neighbourhood.

He convinces the operator of the Dream Cafe, Babu Bhatt, to trash his eclectic menu and strictly serve favourites from his native Pakistan.

But the place still bombs and Jerry's advice continues to haunts Babu right through reruns 22 years later.

Now, I'm no consultant to the food or retail industry either.

And my small-business education only includes sitting in on a couple of chamber of commerce breakfast talks.

But, like Mr. Seinfeld found, it can be as painful as it has been exciting watching small businesses come and go in our former small town.

I've had a front-row, centre seat for the Main Street show during the last 31 years.

Sadly, the demise of some shops could often be predicted the day their sign was erected.

That's not easy to digest, especially knowing good folks have quit their day jobs and invested life savings in their dream.

And some businesses have defied the odds — and our predictions — and continue to flourish. Good on them.

And not that I'm Seinfeld, but a few observations on the Stouffville biz scene, if I may?

• If your business relies on walk-in traffic and high visibility, you'll probably want to be on a main drag. The addi-



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

tional rent money is worth it. Don't park your store on a back road and then blame town council, your landlord or the world for its demise.

(Other businesses, including this one, are largely — save for the printing and distribution of our newsprint editions — conducted electronically now.)

• Don't re-invent the wheel, especially if it's warped and wrapped with a flat tire. We watched the same type of business open and close three times in as many years downtown. One can only imagine the heartache, headaches and financial carnage.

• Know your customers, especially their habits. If you rely on the GO train crowd in this commuter town, you may want to adjust your hours and marketing accordingly. Some merchants have flourished by adopting this principle.

Bottom line? Do your homework. Listen. Prosper. Good luck.

Jim Mason is editor of The Sun-Tribune

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