



STAFF PHOTO/JIM MASON

Harry Bowes Public School (above) parents will hold graduation at Stouffville District Secondary School.

Labour hangover has parents running Gr. 8 graduation, trip

BY SANDRA BOLAN
sbolan@yrmg.com

There were no bonds formed through sports, skills honed through clubs, Christmas concerts or even class trips.

What this past year has taught public elementary school students is that life isn't always easy. There can be conflict and you need to work it out.

Parents learned if you want to provide students with a memorable experience, do it yourself.

And that is exactly what is happening at Harry Bowes Public School.

Parents were notified a few months ago teachers would not participate in this year's graduation ceremony, according to Tamara Carlson, whose son, Austin Meilunas, is in Grade 8.

Parents took it upon themselves to make arrangements for the use of Stouffville District Secondary School, as well as print the tickets, print and send out the invitations and buy the decorations, according to Ms Carlson.

"Until recently, we didn't think there would be awards," she said.

Graduation has always been a volunteer event for teachers, according to the school board.

A few weeks ago, teachers started coming to Principal Rob Dixon, notifying him they would like to participate in the June 25 ceremony.

"Those are personal decisions. I didn't ask for rationale. I just thanked them and wrote their name down," he said, noting eight to 10 teachers will take part.

"I'm pleased a handful of teachers have come to their senses, as far as I'm concerned," Ms Carlson said. "This is about the children, not contract negotiations.

Parents also took it upon themselves to provide the impending graduates with a class trip to Muskoka Woods for three days.

Multi-day Grade 8 class trips have never taken place at the school since it opened five years ago, according to Mr. Dixon. However, there have traditionally been day-long ventures to Toronto Island or a Jays' game.

Ms Carlson, who is a member of the parent committee that planned the graduation and trip, said she wanted her son to attend the trip because, like his classmates, he

worked hard and accomplishments should be celebrated.

"I want you to graduate with class, not just as a class," Ms Carlson said of what she told her son.

About 50 of the 63 Grade 8 students went on last week's trip, according to Mr. Dixon.

Because there was no teacher participation, therefore, no principal or school board approval, students could not be picked up or dropped off on school property. It was done at the Stouffville Arena.

During the three days of school the students missed, classes were still held but there were no tests or assignments handed out, according to Mr. Dixon.

"We were going to be respectful of what the larger parent group wanted to do," he said.

Public elementary school teachers reached a deal back in March and the ETFO suspended its advice to members regarding they not participate in school extracurricular activities.

"I'm not going to say we're completely back to normal," Mr. Dixon said.

"I hope (things will go back to normal in September). It's so removed from my control. It's a big picture thing with boards and unions," he said.

It was a tough school year for elementary students across the province who experienced one-day strikes, a boycott of extracurricular activities and bare-bones fall report cards in response to the provincial government's threat to impose a contract that included a two-year wage freeze and reduction in sick days.

Sam Hammond, president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, said some teachers have told the union they'll never go back to extracurriculars "because of how we were treated by the government. And some have been frustrated and angered that the vast majority of parents don't seem to recognize that these are things they do in their free time".

Those hard feelings mean that some graduation ceremonies and dances across the province – including Harry Bowes – have been affected, with teachers not taking part or by being scheduled during school hours so that teachers will attend.

With files from Torstar News Service

FAITH

Growing church needs town approval to move to new location

BY SANDRA BOLAN
sbolan@yrmg.com

The number of residents with no religious affiliation has increased by almost 5 per cent between 2001 and 2011, according to Statistics Canada. However, the number of people attending the Stouffville Pentecostal Church is growing so much they need to move.

"When we do it with a sense of joy and we do it well, it seems to be resonating with people and they seem to come," said the church's pastor, Jeff Laird.

The church has applied to the town to have four acres of land in the Beacon Hill Business Park re-zoned to allow a church.

The property is currently zoned as employment land, which allows for such things as offices, manufacturing, warehousing, a hotel, convention/banquet facility and commercial school, but no churches.

"... the land use program for this area was designed to concentrate upon more intensive employment-generating business park uses, in recognition of the town's limited supply of serviced employment areas," a June 18 council report states.

A public meeting was held Tuesday night. Only a representative from Gottardo Group spoke out against the application, according to Mr. Laird.

PROPERTY ZONED AS EMPLOYMENT LANDS

No decision was made. A recommendation to council, by staff, will be provided at a later date.

The Stouffville Pentecostal Church was started by pastor Stan Grant in Altona, just east of Stouffville, in 1968.

In 1973, the church purchased 2.5 acres of land at 6853 Main St. where the current building stands. In 1984, the church was renovated, doubling the size of its sanctuary and classrooms.

Today, there are about 150 parishioners attending Sunday service. It can hold a bit more than 200 people but "it's starting to get a little bit tight", Mr. Laird said.

The facility is also multi-level, which is problematic for parishioners who have issues with walking and manoeuvring the stairs.

"It's a little bit dysfunctional," he said.

The proposed church would primarily be on one floor.

The site Stouffville Pentecostal Church wants to move into is currently vacant and on the northeast corner of Hoover Park and Sandiford drives. Immediately to its north is the indoor soccer facility under construction and across the road is Oscar Peterson Public School.

The site was chosen not only for its size but for its location, which is in the heart of the town's growing residential area. It is also close to schools, which would be beneficial for after school programs, according to Mr. Laird.

The new church will be paid for through proceeds from the sale of 12 acres of agricultural land the church owned on Tenth Line north of the Stouffville Country Market and the sale of its current property, along with fundraising, according to Mr. Laird. The decision was made to not move onto the 12 acres of land it once owned because of its location.

The cost of the new facility is unknown as the drawings provided to the town represent preliminary concepts.

If the re-zoning application is approved, then site plans will be submitted to the town for approval. If all goes the way Mr. Laird is hoping, construction would start in the spring and they would move in later next year.