

Our rural-urban split still haunting residents

We've been asking you about this place we all call home.

Do you vote? Would you recognize your local councillor and our mayor in a police line-up? Could you find the municipal offices without using your navigation system?

It's all part of our Big 5-0 election project. Check out the stories and videos at yorkregion.com

We're hoping to get you thinking about municipal politics. Especially the 50-per-cent plus of you who would probably pick



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

dental surgery, optional colonoscopies and extended jury duty

over voting locally.

You told us some of the biggest municipal issues that affect your life.

Many spoke of the loss of our small-town charm, thanks to living in one of the fastest-growing small towns in Canada.

Some of you resurrected the redevelopment of Memorial Park, a ship that has nearly fully sailed.

Traffic, something we once joked about here in the former village, is no laughing matter with you.

This ain't Hooterville or Mayberry any longer, folks.

And there's no turning the clock

back or turning off the Big Pipe, the sewage line from the south that accommodated all this growth.

But the big issue that's hit home with me is our unnatural urban-rural split.

When I started working here in 1982 and glance at the map of Whitchurch-Stouffville, I honestly thought it was a bad joke.

Who would construct a municipality with the centre of government, recreation and commerce in one corner?

The Ontario government, that's who, during its controversial frenzy of municipal amalgamations more than 40 years ago.

Their handiwork continues to

play havoc with us today. Residents with Newmarket or Mount Albert addresses and phone numbers say their only connection to this municipality is their payment of taxes.

They shop, recreate and worship in nearby Newmarket, Aurora and Uxbridge.

Pity the rural councillor who has to explain to his or her constituents why the new parks, schools, trails and other facilities are being built in Stouffville.

Because geographically, it makes no sense.

Jim Mason is editor of The Sun Tribune. Follow him on Twitter @stouffeditor

COMING UP: Storm hurt 2012 event

Charity ride hopes for bounce-back year

BY SANDRA BOLAN
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A storm kept riders away last year. Hopefully Mother Nature won't be so surly Aug. 4.

That is when the seventh annual Al Humphrey Memorial Ride takes place.

Since 2007, the event has raised \$111,000 for various charities.

"That's not to be sneezed at," said Norma Humphrey, event founder and chairperson.

"For what we are offering to the equestrians and what we're giving to the charities, we're doing very well," she said.

Mrs. Humphrey started the ride in memory of her husband Al, who was an avid rider and loved to take others out on the trails. He died from prostate cancer in 2006.

"I think he would be amazed how people are supporting it," his widow said.

Local resident Susan Caldwell never met Mr. Humphrey, but has taken part in the ride five of the previous six years and she plans on doing it again next month "because it's in my neighbourhood. I strongly like to support things locally."

The event also enables Ms Caldwell, a western riding instructor, the opportunity to get deep into the York Region Forest without getting lost, thanks to event-day markers.

There is more to the 25K ride than a marked trail.

There is coffee and breakfast in the morning, a lunch stop and post-ride barbecue, complete with entertainment.

"We neighbours like to do stuff like that," Ms Caldwell said.

The barbecue is open to the entire community. The cost is \$10. You just need to purchase tickets prior to the day of the ride.

The event hasn't changed much over the years.

But what is different is the minimum pledge amount. Last year it was bumped up to \$150. This year, it's down to \$50 because it was too high and discouraged riders from taking part, according to Mrs. Humphrey.

"The one out-balanced the other," she said.

Last year's charities — Make-a-Wish Canada and the Markham Stouffville Hospital's palliative care unit — each received \$9,000 despite participation from only 40 of the almost 100 registered riders.

"It was a big drop and big disappointment," she said, noting it was the first time the event has been marred by bad weather.

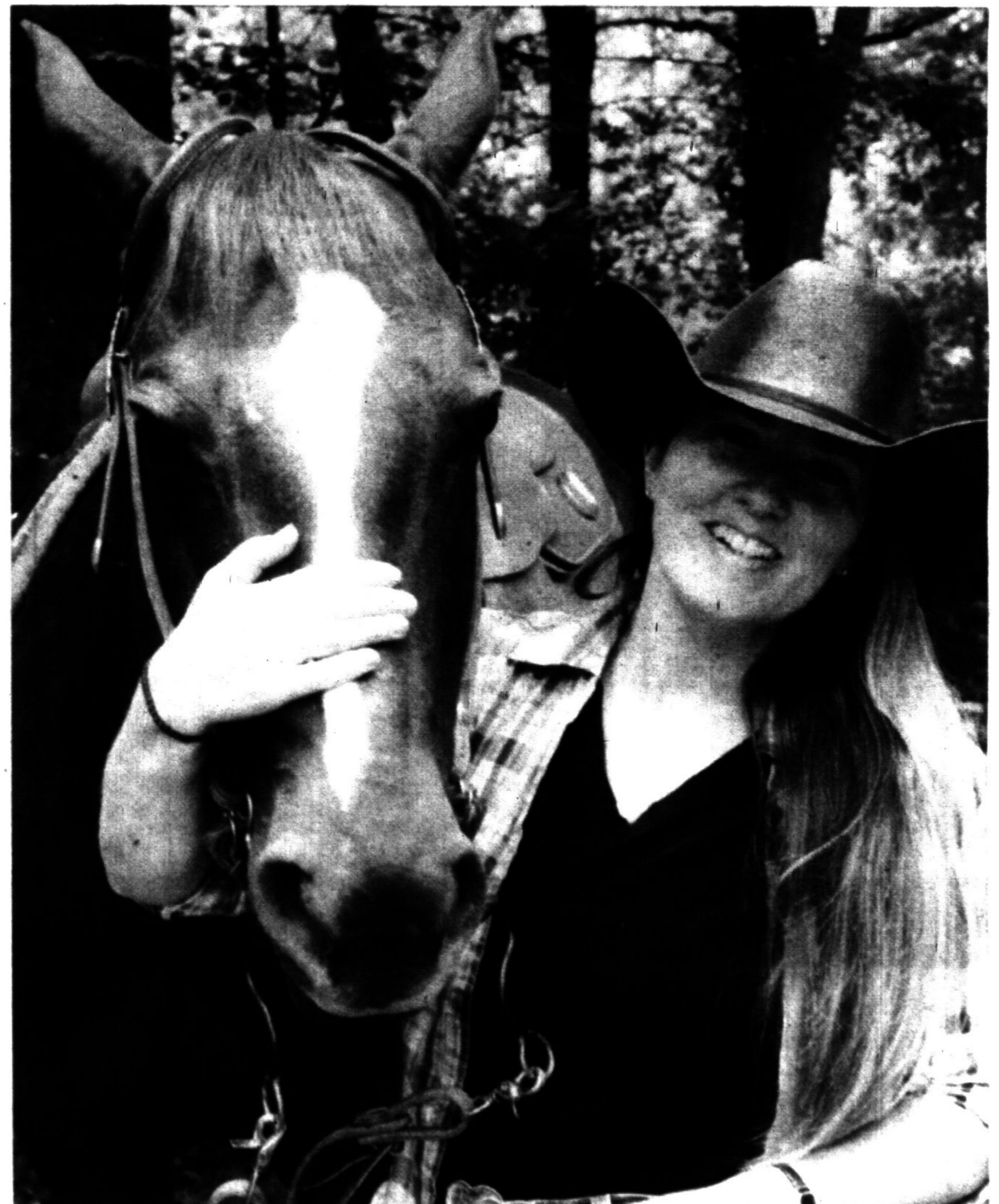
All those who did not ride were asked to send in their donations so they could be passed on to the charities. Mrs. Humphrey said only one person did it.

This year's charities are Make-a-Wish and Windreach Farm Foundation, which helps people with intellectual and physical disabilities acquire hands-on farm and stable-related experiences.

"They blow your mind," Mrs. Humphrey said of the Durham operation.

Registration is \$50 until July 28, then \$70 until Aug. 3. Registrations are not accepted on the day of the ride.

For more information and to register, go to www.alhumphreymemorialride.com



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Susan Caldwell and her quarterhorse Tia will take part in the Al Humphrey Memorial Ride in the York Region Forest next month. You can take part even if you don't ride a horse.