

# Memories of Altona for sale

The hamlet of Altona, three kilometres east of Stouffville, is a quiet four corners surrounded by Pickering Airport country.

But not always so.

Back in the mid-1900s, it was a busy rural hamlet that included two stores, two churches, a school, apple butter factory, several attractive homes, many productive farms and an agricultural depot called Altona Feed and Supplies.

Fred Lewis, the feed store owner/operator, was the community's heart and soul. The son of Bertram and Elizabeth (Anthony) Lewis, Fred was the centre of everything. What he lacked in formal education was supplanted by determination, honesty and integrity.

He now lives in Minesing, northwest of Barrie.

After attending high school only a few weeks, Fred decided hoeing turnips for \$1 a day would be more advantageous. He suggested the teacher turn his desk over to someone else. "I was willing to learn by making mistakes," he says. Later, he returned to school, serving a nine-year trustee term on the Altona board along with Fred Nighswander and Fred McNair.

Mr. Lewis made his big move in 1946 when he opened Altona Feed and Supplies. In addition to fulfilling the tractor requirements of area farmers, he also sold motorcycles and lawnmowers. Assisted by longtime employees Frank White, Bob Hall and Paul Meyer, business flourished.

However, this would all end in 1975 when local MP Norm Cafik delivered an eviction notice, saying his property was needed for an airport.

"I'd heard rumours," Fred said, "but the message still came as a shock."

In the months that followed, the entire area changed. Fred and Ruth Lewis were among those who reluctantly left. They acquired land near Minesing on which they built a home and where Fred still resides. Ruth died in 2001.

Forever the entrepreneur, Fred turned his once-flourishing tractor business into a successful hobby, purchasing machines, all of them Fords, from private owners and public auctions.



## Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

To this display he added pickup trucks, many obtained from Western Canada. Hours were spent refurbishing the vehicles to showroom condition. Eager buyers came from as far as Holland, Belgium, New York and the Maritimes.

On Sept. 2, another chapter in Fred's life will all but end. Beginning at 10:30 a.m., 30 tractors and several trucks will be sold. At age 91, Fred's entering into what he describes as semi-retirement. He'll hold a few tractors back "for old time's sake".

*However, this would all end in 1975 when local MP Norm Cafik delivered an eviction notice, saying his property was needed for an airport.*

The auction will also include other pieces of machinery, as well as several stoves and more than 50,000 board feet of lumber.

Seyern Auctioneering of Shelburne is in charge, assisted by Gary Hill and Phil Faulkner, both of Uxbridge. The event will last the entire day. The location is the intersection of Simcoe and Seadon roads, south of Minesing.

Despite his departure from native Altona more than 30 years ago, Fred hasn't forgotten his roots. He returns often to visit friends and former neighbours but more specifically to pay respects to his late wife - their

wedding anniversary, her birthday and decoration day at Stouffville Cemetery. Fred and Ruth (Slack) were married Oct. 19, 1940 and had nine children: Roy of Glasgow, Earl of Cochrane, Alt. Terry (deceased), Lorne of Altona and five daughters, Jean Harper of Peterborough, Shirley Hanson of Brooklin, Joyce Johnson of Stratford; June Powell (deceased) and Helen Hamerston of Stouffville.

There are 23 grandchildren and 35 great-grandchildren.

Fred recalls Altona's two stores, one operated by Ollie Madill and the other by John Monkhouse. He remembers the fine china Mr. Monkhouse would import from England, treasured pieces that attracted buyers from miles around. He also recalls weigh scales at the site. Hay-haulers were charged 10 cents regardless of whether their wagons were loaded or empty.

His favourite memory relates to the acquisition of Altona's public school and its transformation into a community centre. When the school board put the building up for sale, Fred pondered the possibility of its purchase. By chance, Stouffville philanthropist, the late Art Latcham, called in at the Lewis store. "What are you waiting for?" Fred recalls Latcham saying, "you buy it and I'll pay for it." But Fred refused. "Let's do it together," he said. They did.

"The hall served an important purpose," Fred says. "We had dances, euchres, wedding receptions, pancake festivals - a little bit of everything."

All the while, business was booming at the feed store.

"In 1970, we sold 138 motorcycles and mopeds," Fred recalls.

Over a period of five years, lawnmower sales totalled close to 400. It seemed like every farmer in the area owned a Lewis tractor. However, this all ended with the 1972 airport expropriation. Fred Lewis pulled up stakes.

Altona would never be the same. Neither will things be quite the same at 2403 Seadon Road, RR 2, Barrie after Sept. 2.

*Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.*

# You want to be elected, eh?

The York Region Media Group's Big 50 project is designed to get you interested in voting.

Hopefully.

Can we assume you now know fewer than 50 per cent of us visited a poll during the 2010 municipal election in Whitchurch-Stouffville?

Maybe The Bachelorette was on that night. Or Nofrills had a clearance on kumquats. Or 55 per cent of us had a cold.

Whatever, it's an unacceptable number. You've been bad.

That's voting. But what about seeking office, Whitchurch-Stouffville?

Mayor Wayne Emmerson, who said before the last election he won't be running this time, predicts a record slate of hopefuls to be seeking his office and the six seats that surround him in the council chambers.

Good on them. It's one thing to chirp from the back row at a town meeting or over a cold one with your pals on the weekend.

It's another to create a platform, put your name forward and start knocking on doors and creating an online presence looking for support.

*You'll be recognized in Giant Tiger or as you put your recycling out - correctly, right?*

A few tips from someone who has covered hundreds of candidates in elections of all varieties?

• This isn't just a popularity contest. It's not just walking around weekend festivals, Rob Ford, kissing babies and posing for cellphone video. It's long, sometimes boring, meetings until all hours.

• Thicken thy skin. Your



## Off The Top

with Jim Mason

mom won't believe it, but not everyone's going to be smitten by you or your politics. You'll lose people you thought were friends and pick up enemies. This is not a pretty game.

• Remember, you'll become a public figure. Your name will be in the paper - even if you don't return our calls. You'll be recognized in Giant Tiger or as you put your recycling out - correctly, right?

• Do thy homework. Know the municipal and planning acts. They're big. Know what local council does and don't delve into provincial or federal matters.

• Talk to councillors past and present about the workload, including the committee meetings and night and afternoon work. How much time will you require to deal with constituent concerns? Can you afford those hours?

• Do you have conflicts of interest? How about those acres of land the family owns in the municipality? And there's that pesky relative who works for the town.

Now, register that domain name and order your lawn signs.

Fourteen months and counting, candidates.

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



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