

Claudette's pride shines through

Whitchurch-Stouffville doesn't have a Nelson Mandela, a Martin Luther King or a Jackie Robinson.

But it does have a Claudette Zaborne and her presence is having a visible effect on the vivacity of our town.

Claudette's most recent upcoming endeavour is chief organizer of a concert Feb. 22 at the Lebovic Centre for Arts and Entertainment – Nineteen on the Park, an event celebrating Black History Month. This experience, although conventional across Canada, is a first for our community. It will run from 1 to 3 p.m. Admission is free.

A member of the Stouffville Multicultural Association, Claudette had such an occasion in mind long before the SMCA was established but considered the scheduling premature. "Now, the time is right," she declares.

The two-hour program will comprise both vocal and instrumental music, plus several speakers.

Invited guests include Rosemary Sadler, president of the Black History Society, Mayor Wayne Emerson, Oak Ridges-Markham MP Paul Calandra and MPP Helena Jaczek.

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, one of eight in the family of Lance and Sybil Grant, Claudette received her elementary and secondary school education in her then homeland before immigrating to Canada where she attended several colleges and York University.

It was while a resident in the Agincourt area she decided, in her own words, "to escape the hustle and bustle of suburbia and slow down a little."

Initially, she envisioned living in Newmarket but, en route, took a side trip to Stouffville. It was love at first sight – a beautiful town to raise a family, she says.

An only son, Majeed, 16, is a Grade 11 student attending St. Brother Andre High School in Markham.

While a 2011 census described Whitchurch-Stouffville's social ability as far above the national average, Claudette didn't initially find it this way. She was part of the black



Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

minority, (2.1 per cent of the population), and sometimes made to feel this way, especially during her first visit to a local church.

"I felt somewhat uncomfortable," she said, "I've never been back." She's currently a member in the congregation of Stouffville Pentecostal Church.

But that was then. This is now. A lot has changed in the last seven years, she says, acceptance takes time. She's full of praise for people living on her street, residents representing various cultures and languages. She describes her own legacy as "many distinctive shades of brown but all under the umbrella of the Negro race".

'I felt somewhat uncomfortable. I've never been back.'

It's with this intense ethnic pride she'll carry the black history banner onto the stage at Stouffville's Nineteen on the Park, Feb. 22. If successfully supported, she's hopeful the occasion can become an annual event.

"I know in my heart I'm one of God's children," she says. "This concert is an opportunity to learn about and share the experiences, contributions and achievements of people of African ancestry, individuals who have left an imprint on Canadian society."

The black history movement, Claudette explains, had its begin-

ning back in 1926 in conjunction with Abraham Lincoln's birthday. One of the leaders was Frederick Douglas, a former slave. Later, Jean Augustine, the first black female MP in the Chretien government, introduced a motion adopting a similar Canadian crusade. This was eventually approved by parliament in 1995. Rosemary Sadler, an invited concert guest, has continued to carry the torch.

"It's all about diversity, togetherness, education and awareness," says Claudette. "Whitchurch-Stouffville is a town that now includes people of different cultures and languages. Hopefully, we can learn from one another. With God's help, attitudes will change."

Claudette feels the Stouffville Multicultural Association has a definite part to play in awakening longtime residents to the fact, culture wise, the town is changing. Of the SMCA, Claudette emphasizes "we're a small volunteer group, still new to many people but hopefully, through inter-action, we can make a difference."

Says SMCS founder Joanne Iannuzzi: "Our members represent many cultures. As we celebrate our differences, we hope everyone will become part of a great community."

If Claudette had, on her arrival, any intentions of "slowing down a little", there's been no indication of this, quite the opposite. In addition to her regular work, that of providing home-care for seniors under the business name of Zorba in-Home Support, she keeps her volunteer fingers on the pulse of the community through the Stouffville Policing Centre, Habitat for Humanity; Markham Stouffville, Southlake and Sick Children's hospitals, the Canadian Diabetes Association; the York Region United Way, the Canadian Mental Health Association, York Regional Police's victim services unit and last, but not least, the multicultural association.

An overdue welcome is warranted.

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

Big-city problems right at home in small town

The gangly guy was loud, profane and in her face demanding money in front of — of all places — a women's shelter.

I strolled into the picture en route to buying milk for my daughter who lives up the street, all in the shadows of Ryerson University's downtown Toronto campus.

Luckily, perhaps, for the woman on the corner, the street beggar's attention on the crowded sidewalk quickly turned to me.

"Give me money or I'll strangle you," he said, his hands quickly moving toward my throat and his eyes glowing wildly like oversized high beams.

I somehow pulled a Phil Kessel, ducked his advance, told him loudly I had no money (just a debit card) and kept moving, my heart pumping at full capacity.

The man asking for cash cursed me and moved to a stoop. When I returned a few minutes later, a jug of one-per-cent in hand, he was gone. So was the woman. It was like it didn't happen.

But it did.

I think of that guy often, and not just in my nightmares. I wonder what led him to that place, in front of the shelter and the student barbecue joint, a few blocks south of Toronto's LGBT village.

Mental illness? Addiction?

Surely, he has a family. Somewhere.

We'd like to think this couldn't happen in Stouffville the good.



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

We live in the former village, a farming community where everyone knows each other and takes care of each other, right?

Maybe in 1964. Not now.

The dude who was about to strangle me could have been the man who regularly kicks the newspaper box in front of The Sun-Tribune offices, for no reason, apparently.

Or the woman who angrily talks to herself when she walks by.

There are the people who threaten injury to our customer service employee because they don't receive their copy of the newspaper.

Or the folks who visit our churches in growing numbers looking for food or money. Just something to get them and their family through the week.

It happens. Too often.

Right here.

Right under our own noses.

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

GET CONNECTED



CARE TO COMMENT:
facebook.com/Stouffville
Sun-Tribune

Want to get your word out to ALL of Stouffville?

Your Sun-Tribune gets the job done.

Call our advertising consultants today at 905-640-2612 to find out how easy and affordable it is to advertise.

Stouffville
Sun-Tribune