

# Tow truck family no 'vultures'

**F**orty years – a business built on honesty, integrity and reliability. That's the secret of success earned by Brian Lee, formerly of Stouffville and now owner/operator of Budget Towing in Markham. From a meagre start of one truck back in 1974 to a fleet of 21 today, the company serves a Canadian Automobile Association area that includes Whitchurch-Stouffville, Richmond Hill and Markham.

"I remember entering my first truck in Markham's Santa Claus Parade," says Brian. "That's how it all began."

He's now a regular participant in Stouffville's Kinsmen-sponsored procession as well as Markham's, winning the mayor's award here on two occasions.

"When Markham and Stouffville held parades the same day it was difficult for us to attend both," explains wife Cathy. "Now we can. It's a lot of fun."

Born in Gormley, one of 12 in the family of Jim and Mavyn Lee, Brian and Bruce, premature identical twins, required emergency care necessitating transportation by taxi from Newmarket's then-York County Hospital to the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto.

"The taxi fare was \$11," Brian says with a smile. "It would cost more today."

Later, the Lee family moved to Stouffville where Brian received his elementary education.

His grandfather, Bert Lickorish, was a highly respected village resident and devoted supporter of Stouffville Branch 459 of the Royal Canadian Legion. Brian was 12 when his parents re-located to Markham.

After two Markham service station jobs and a coffee delivery service, Brian saved sufficient money to purchase a car. However, during a visit to Unionville Motors, his eyes fell on a tow truck. The truck, rather than a car, became a proud possession, one that would ultimately



## Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

mately shape his career.

Over time, one tow truck became two and two became four, necessitating a base station. This he found on Markham's Laidlaw Boulevard, a one-acre property that now includes a coin car wash.

"Best move I ever made," he says. Not only are the trucks kept spotlessly clean but he fills in his spare time counting loonies and toonies.

The Budget fleet ranges from several light and medium sized vehicles to a single heavy-hauler. All are equipped with two-way radios and computers.

To provide round-the-clock service seven days a week requires 20 full and part-time employees. Five are despatchers. Brian's a firm believer in detailed training. He shares this responsibility with Mike Armstrong, a staff member of more than 25 years.

"Everyone looks up to him," he says.

Cathy handles the bookkeeping chores and also answers calls. She's assisted by daughter Janice. "We're a team," Cathy says.

Numbers of calls, averaging 70 per day, depend on the weather.

"This past winter we've been really busy," Brian said.

With respect to cost there's no cross-the-board flat rate, he explains. He tries to be fair. He bases his fee on the size of vehicle he's called to tow and the tow-distance travelled. He readily admits

some companies take unfair advantage of customers.

"They think they're performing a service when, in fact, they're vultures," Cathy said.

"This is where I live," adds Brian, "I must walk up and down Main Street."

Brian holds high praise for the CAA where, since 1999 he's held a 'preferred' rating. Initially, CAA responses totaled 30 per cent. Now it's 85 cent.

During the past 40 years, Brian and his team have answered calls to thousands of accidents, some serious.

One of these involved a husband and wife on Hwy. 48 at Ringwood. Their car was hit head-on by a loaded gravel truck. Both died, the wife instantly and her husband a few hours later.

On another occasion, a New York couple driving a motorhome crashed into a garbage truck at the intersection of Markham's Ninth Line and Hwy. 7. The wife, a passenger, was killed.

In yet another fatality, a North York firefighter died near Locust Hill when his car careened out of control and hit a house.

"Sure, these tragedies bother me," Brian said, "but I'm there to do a job just like police and ambulance operators do theirs."

One event Brian vividly remembers was the 1977 Markham Fair. It rained continually, turning the McCowan Road site into a mud bowl. Cars and trucks were stuck everywhere.

"At first it was agreed I'd be paid \$5 a tow," Brian recalls, "but when the numbers reached 33 pulls per hour, officials wanted to talk it over."

He was the fair's president in 1994.

Retirement plans? Brian's non-committal. But Cathy isn't. "I think he'd be happiest as one man with one truck."

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

# Church of Sunday Morning Hockey scores with followers

**Y**ou're excused if you don't know who Rick Curran is.

He's a behind-the-scenes guy in the NHL, a player agent since 1978 who now works with Bobby Orr's hockey group out of Philadelphia.

Eric Lindros was a client. The Orr agency represents a stable full of NHLers, including the Staal brothers from Thunder Bay, Los Angeles King Jeff Carter and Tomas Plekanec of the Montreal Canadiens.

Mr. Curran is a Scarborough native with many a solid memory of this town, centred around playing the game he now works in at the old Stouffville Arena.

Now home to a parking lot — cue the quintessential Joni Mitchell tune — across from Latcham Hall in Memorial Park, it was the town's lone ice pad before being demolished in the mid-1980s.

But not on Sundays during the 1960s.

It's hard to imagine now, in this town of four ice pads, but Stouffville hockey teams didn't need the ice back then.

Enter hockey organizations from the south who gladly scooped up the open hours.

Christians from four Whitchurch-Stouffville churches took turns carrying a wooden cross through downtown Stouffville early Good Friday. They stopped at Stations of the Cross, reciting verse and replicating Jesus' journey to his crucifixion. (See page 29.)

The route came within steps of that old arena site.

And how different a place Stouffville is now.

Friday's cross walk passed Main Street's bustling coffee bars, breakfast joints and bars. Passed an Islamic centre.

The cross walkers were outnumbered by the cyclists and



## Off The Top

with Jim Mason

runners they were passed by.

Doubt that would have happened in '63.

Now, Sundays certainly aren't as sacred. You can shop for everything from vodka to Volvos. There's a good chance someone in your family works on Sundays.

Arenas everywhere have no trouble renting Sabbath ice.

The Church of Sunday Morning Hockey.

This isn't just a Stouffville thing.

United Church attendance nationally is less than half of what it was 25 years ago. Presbyterian numbers have declined annually during the past 10 years.

It's been called "believe without belonging".

Less than one-third of Canadians who say Jesus is the Son of God attend church with any frequency, according to a Presbyterian report.

Still, there are bright spots on the local church landscape.

Springvale Baptist and East-Ridge Evangelical Missionary built mega churches, by local standards, during the past decade. Stouffville Pentecostal is erecting a new building in the heart of southern Stouffville.

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

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