

OPINION



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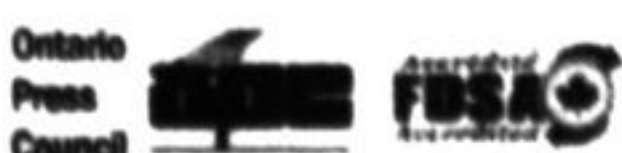
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LETTERS POLICY

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Hoarding help makes our communities safer

A new service offered by CHATS will not only vastly improve the lives of 40 seniors across York Region, it has the potential to reduce fire damage and perhaps deaths in our neighbourhoods.

I'm talking about seniors suffering from a problem called hoarding, and the new program Community & Home Assistance to Seniors offering, called Tenancy Risk Reduction Service.

Yes, hoarding, that affliction of so many people who keep all their children's old toys, decades worth of magazines or newspapers and even let unsafe and unsavoury situations develop around old food in cupboards and refrigerators.

There's even a TV show profiling the agonizing affliction and the first time I watched 10 minutes of the program, with my stomach churning, I had to turn it off.

You see, my mother was a hoarder. I saw her desperate dilemma and my childhood played out on the TV screen — and it wasn't pleasant.

My mother was a wonderful woman in all respects, but she had two problems she couldn't control. One was Multiple Sclerosis, the other was hoarding.

Whether it was growing up at the end of the depression or watching her own mother, my grandmother, saving bits of string, elastics and paper clips for future use, my mother couldn't bear to throw anything out.

It helped that my father's career resulted in two cross-Canada moves, as that forced mom to throw some things away. But when we settled down, during my teen years, in North York (as it was then called), the situation got desperate.

Our basement gradually got filled. Then the spare bedroom. A hallway became unsafely lined with jumbled objects. I fantasized about calling the fire department anonymously, but never had the nerve. How could I rat on and embarrass the mother I loved?

Then I moved out to go to university and my room at home became a repository for "stuff". Didn't we help her clean it up,



Marney Beck

you wonder? Of course we did.

My brother, his fiance (now his wife) and I worked for days once, bringing many, many green garbage bags to the curb, all to no avail. A few months later it was worse than before.

Her progressive symptoms of MS meant she didn't have the strength to clean it up even if she wanted to. My desperate dad moved to our family farm to escape. Then two small fires in the cluttered kitchen forced our family to a decision — mom had to be moved to a retirement home for her own safety.

My parents are no longer living, so this story about our family's shame and pain cannot hurt them.

I hope it will help other families take action to help their own loved ones who may be living in squalor or in conditions that are a danger to themselves and their neighbours.

Imagine how many seniors live in cluttered apartments that are a fire danger to hundreds of others? Or properties on our streets with overflowing garages and attics, rusted cars and soggy furniture blocking laneways from emergency access.

Now you can call CHATS and York Support Services Network to report that a loved one (having a low or middle income) needs help. Their apartment or home may see minor repairs made, cleaning done, and clutter reduced. It might mean someone negotiating with an angry landlord or short-term therapy or specialized geriatric mental health support for your loved one.

If someone you love needs help, contact CHATS at 905-713-6596 or seniorshelp@chats.on.ca

Marney Beck is a York Region Media Group editor

LETTER OF THE WEEK

Shops, restaurants inaccessible to many seniors, disabled residents

As a resident of the Stouffville Creek Retirement Residence, I have become increasingly aware of the lack of accessibility for seniors to the restaurants and other shops on Main Street in old downtown Stouffville.

It is impossible for seniors, and people with disabilities, to get into these businesses with our walkers and/or wheelchairs due to the architectural barriers.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 addressed this issue, but clearly, the shops of old Stouffville have failed to comply in the past 10 years,

leaving them only 10 years left to become compliant.

I would think a simple fix would be the installation of ramps leading up to the doorways.

The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville and these shops need to get on with this.

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RON CARTER
STOUFFVILLE

Events should be included in festival

Re: Festival boasts plenty to be proud of, room for improvement, column by Jim Thomas, July 10.

Mr. Thomas' column included the statement "The Music Festival and the Lions barbecue should be considered an integral part of the festival program".

I would agree and suggest inclusion of a third event, the Strawberry Festival Lawn Bowling Tournament.

Unfortunately, in the past few years the festival committee has excluded the tournament from the agenda of activities.

This year marked the 25th time the Lawn Bowling Club — celebrating its 120th anniversary this year — has hosted a special tournament in order to be a participant in the Strawberry Festival week.

The event supports the Lions barbecue. Two afternoon games, then the barbecue and a third game played in the evening.

This tournament attracts more spectators than any other during the bowling season. Players from 10 clubs took part in the tournament this year.

I hope in the future the festival committee will rec-

ognize all three of these events as an integral part of strawberry festivities.

MARGARET CURTIS
STOUFFVILLE

Why spray weeds with chemical, town?

Re: Town shifting gears on weed control, July 10.

Unfortunately, The Sun-Tribune's article on the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville's use of the herbicide Fiesta only skims the surface of the negative aspects of this particular herbicide.

This is what happens when one only looks at the MSD sheet and company's website — both questionable sources of "objective" data.

Somebody at the town must really have it out for dandelions if they insist on covering us all in yet another chemical...

A simple search on the Internet shows a startlingly different story about not only the efficacy of the product, but raises plenty of questions about its safety.

First, it is not a natural or organic product. Chlathed iron, the main ingredient, is produced by mixing iron with other chemicals, most notably ethylenediaminetetraacetate — a synthetic compound that has been found to cause reproductive and developmental defects.

Second, it is not overly effective on most weeds, requiring multiple applications — although the "safe" use calls for a maximum of two applications. Some users have reported the need for six to eight applications to see any impact.

With our broadening understanding of the role that neonicotinoids has had in contributing to colony collapse disorder of bees — and the threat that poses to our food production — one would think we would be wise enough to discontinue the spraying of chemicals over wide swaths of our environment.

(This doesn't even touch on all the other chemicals we have created and poisoned our planet with.)

Somebody at the town must really have it out for dandelions if they insist on covering us all in yet another chemical whose impact may not show itself immediately.

STEVE BULL
WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE