

# Golden career kick-started by Toronto Argos

By Kate Gilderdale  
Stouffville This Month

"My 50 year career as a professional artist started with a phone call."

John Roberts was recalling the time his uncle, Bob Moran, who was president of the Toronto Argonauts

Football Club from 1950-1952, called to ask his nephew if he would be interested in illustrating the cover of the club's 1952 program. "This was my very first art job, for which I was paid a balloon tire bicycle, an Argo jacket, and a football with all the

players' names on it."

That year the Argos won the Grey Cup, and the young artist also received a Grey Cup ring for his efforts. The following month, William R. Templeton, who owned a large art company in the city, visited Northern

Vocational School where Mr. Roberts was studying art. "(He) saw a pen and ink illustration I had done for Stephen Leacock's 'Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town'."

Mr. Templeton was so impressed he suggested to Mr. Roberts' teacher that the talented youngster should contact the art editor of the Canadian Red Cross Junior magazine, and thus began a long and illustrious artistic career. "Nineteen fifty-two turned out to be a very exciting year for this 17-year-old vocational art student," noted Mr. Roberts.

"The only thing I've got left (from the Argos) is the jacket. The ring was stolen in New York City and I kicked the football around because it was a professional football and I played in high school." In fact he had seriously considered the sport as a potential career option until fate intervened.

Over the years, he has had many memorable experiences, one of which occurred in the early 1960s. "We were living and working in New York City when a Christmas card arrived at our apartment. It was signed 'Vincent Van Gogh'." Mr. Roberts showed it to his wife, Elizabeth, observing that someone must be playing a joke on the couple.

"It's no joke, John," his wife replied. "Mr. Van Gogh is my father's boss." He was also the son of the artist's younger brother, Theo, who named him in honour of his famous uncle. "Two weeks into January 1964, a second card arrived from Vincent Van Gogh. This time it was an invitation to view his uncle's work at the Guggenheim Museum."

On arrival they were greeted by Mr. Van Gogh and his wife, and taken on a tour of the top floor of the museum. "The architect Frank Lloyd Wright had designed the museum in the round," said Mr. Roberts. "We walked down and around, viewing Van



Fifty years after he designed the 1952 Argos' program cover, John Roberts is seen creating a new work of art with the Roadside Painters, a group of local artists who meet regularly to capture the beauty of our rural landscape.

Goghs on both sides of the walls. It was the experience of a lifetime."

Last fall, on Sept. 11, he was working on his island cottage on Big Kashegagob Lake, when he noticed that things were unusually quiet. "We saw no planes bringing in cottagers; only a helicopter flying over our island. We have no radio or television at our cabin."

On that day, he said, "the water around our island was like glass, very unusual for a northern lake. For this reason I decided to paint a water-colour of this glass-like water." He also did a painting of the pine trees on the island before leaving for Stouffville the following day.

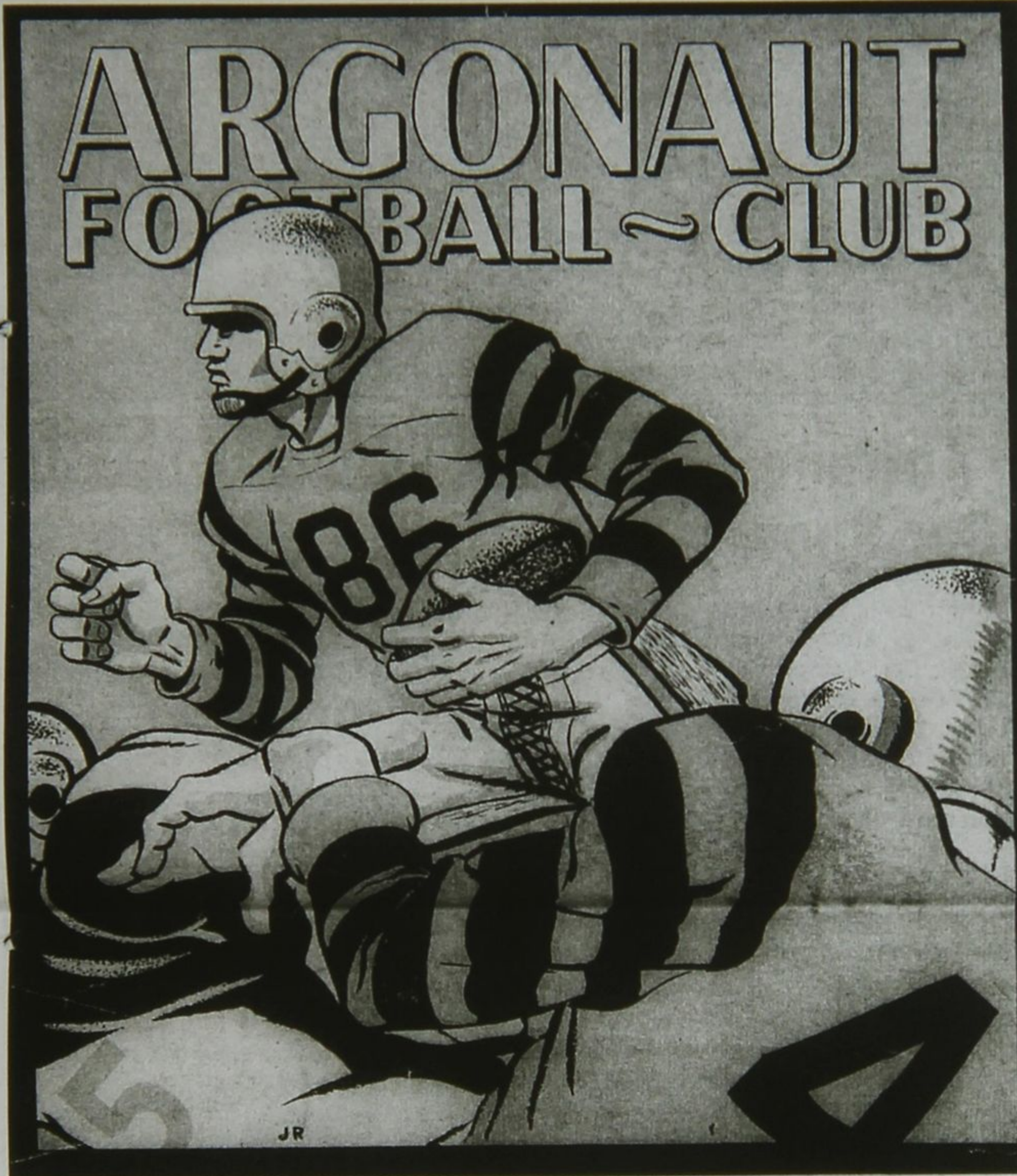
"When I finished the paintings, we went to pick up our car at the local airport. The pilot was there. He had a funny look on his face and I asked him why he wasn't flying." He told Mr. Roberts that all air traffic had been grounded as a result of the terrorist attack in New York. "We were in shock and I felt empathy for the new president, who had only been in office eight months."

He decided to send both the paintings he had

done on Sept. 11 to the U.S. president as an expression of sympathy. In June, Mr. Roberts' gift was acknowledged in a letter from the Oval Office, personally signed by George W. Bush. The president's message read, "Thank you for your kind gesture. I appreciate your good wishes."

Mr. Roberts is a founding member of the Roadside Painters, a group of area artists who get together regularly to paint in outdoor locations. Works by the group were featured at an exhibition at the Clock Tower building during this year's Strawberry Festival. "We're really grateful to Janine Zeck, because she did most of the work on that," he said.


An art teacher at Stouffville District Secondary School for many years, Mr. Roberts is a strong supporter of community causes and local arts groups, and a regular contributor to the Latcham Gallery's fundraising auction. He is presently donating three paintings a month to the Care and Share shop to help raise funds for the Mennonite Central Council.



The cover of the 1952 Toronto Argonauts program was John Roberts' very first commission. The Stouffville artist was an avid football fan who considered pursuing a career in the sport until his artistic aspirations took him in a very different direction.

## Margaret's Corner - by Margaret L. May, Stouffville

"Jammed" Sessions	Not Interested	No Way!	Operating Deficits
I submit that, when Councillors are "dumped" with over-loaded agendas, they should DEMAND that the Council meeting be adjourned and rescheduled with a reasonable number of items.	I submit that Councillors should NOT show disrespect to their Ward residents by walking out of Council meetings/Public Hearings before listening to public concerns.	I submit that Councillors should publicly REFUSE to accept late additions to Council agendas since they are given no time for discussions with their Ward residents.	I submit that Public Library Boards should set up adequate cash flows from their unused surplus and reserve moneys, and be able to avoid accumulating major operating deficits.



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