



Helene Johnson, president and CEO of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Chamber of Commerce, was a guest speaker at a pre-budget discussion in November. Here she is seen with organizer Oak Ridges MP Bryon Wilfert and fellow guests George Vandebek of BDO Dunwoody and Mary Webb of Scotia Economics.

Chamber vibrant community force

More than 50 people packed the November meeting of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Chamber of Commerce, with new contacts established and old ties renewed.

Through a partnership with Loren Consulting Group, the Chamber now offers an online computer training program for company employees, which they can access from work or home. "It's a very affordable program, well suited to the smallest or largest of our members," said Chamber president and C.E.O. Helene Johnson.

Mrs. Johnson was one of three guest speakers invited to participate in a November pre-budget discussion hosted by Bryon Wilfert, MP for Oak Ridges and secretary to the Minister of Finance. The

objective of the event was to address several key economic issues including health care, social spending and the Kyoto Protocol.

"I did a presentation on behalf of our Chamber at the meeting," said Mrs. Johnson. "I talked about many topics including the Kyoto Accord. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce have directed the government not to sign this accord carte blanche. I suggested that we have a made-in-Canada approach to this accord and this seems to be what's happening," she noted.

"(The federal government) are now talking to the provinces. John Q public jumped on the bandwagon and said, 'We're all for it,' but they didn't know

the whole story and how it might affect jobs." Mrs. Johnson was joined on the speakers' panel by Mary Webb, a senior economist and manager with Scotia Economics, and George Vandebek, a tax partner at BDO Dunwoody.

The local Chamber is in the process of producing an updated business directory comprising 900 listings, which is due to be published early in the New Year. The Chamber's 'Take Your Staff to Lunch' Christmas Party will be held Dec. 5 at Sleepy Hollow Golf and Country Club and will feature entertainment by the Summitview Bell Ringers and pianist Jean Thomas, with a visit from Santa to round out the fun.

Tickets are \$30. Call 905-642-4227 for reservations.

Rural Reflections

God bless us, every one!

by
Ruth
LeBlanc



I know it's a cliché, but Christmas is my favourite time of year.

As early fall approaches, and the leaves start to turn color, I feel an inner anticipation growing and I immediately know the source. I try to keep it at bay for, as they say, a decent period of time, but the spirit of Christmas recklessly invades my thoughts.

The sounds of my favourite festive songs, "Winter Wonderland" and "White Christmas", unpredictably and uncontrollably come to mind and mouth. Music, to me, is a critical component of the Christmas season. Even if you think you don't want to hear it at first, before you know it you will be humming the tunes unaware, the Christmas spirit will be growing in you and your season will be jollier.

Then, as Christmas nears, along come those delectable seasonal treats that are as important to the season as Santa Claus. Kitchens like mine in Whitchurch-Stouffville will pull out flour and rolling pins and the Christmas baking will officially begin. Cookies, mincemeat pies and thousands of Rice Krispie marshmallow squares will be devoured this Christmas in rural homes alone, a startling but true statistic.

Bathroom scales and belts from Vandorf to Lincolnville will tell the tale, but it is still worth every delicious calorie! It is a rite of the season to over-indulge guilt-free.

Get out and enjoy one of the Christmas events going on all over our countryside and see old friends or make some new ones. The Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum in Vandorf held a Victorian Tea and Bake and Craft Sale on Nov. 22. I attended with a friend in tow,

and we were served tea in proper china cups, as well as homemade trifle and plum pudding along with a sinfully large plateful of goodies made by the Friends of the Museum.

One of the Friends, Bertha Pattenden, was dressed in Victorian lace, and along with the other volunteers made this a really Christmassy event that encouraged you to slow down and savour the setting and the smell of pine and cedar.

Last Friday the Ballantrae Lions held their Annual Seniors' Christmas Dinner at the Ballantrae Community Centre. Over a hundred seniors ate a full turkey dinner and enjoyed some really great entertainers. Locals the Fiddling Quarries Family, Daniella Warner, David Baxter, Al Strawbridge, Sue Sherban and others volunteered their time and talents to make this a memorable night for all the guests in attendance.

Sharing and caring come to the forefront when Christmas approaches and we remember life is all about family and friends, the good times and fond memories we have of Christmases past. Christmas, I have learned with age, is not a day but a state of mind.

Charles Dickens said it best in the seasonal favourite *A Christmas Carol*. "I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round, as a good time, a kind time, a forgiving, charitable, pleasant time, the only time I know of when men and women consent to open their shut-up hearts freely."

It was said that Scrooge, after encountering the spirits, knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us all. And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless us, every one!

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