

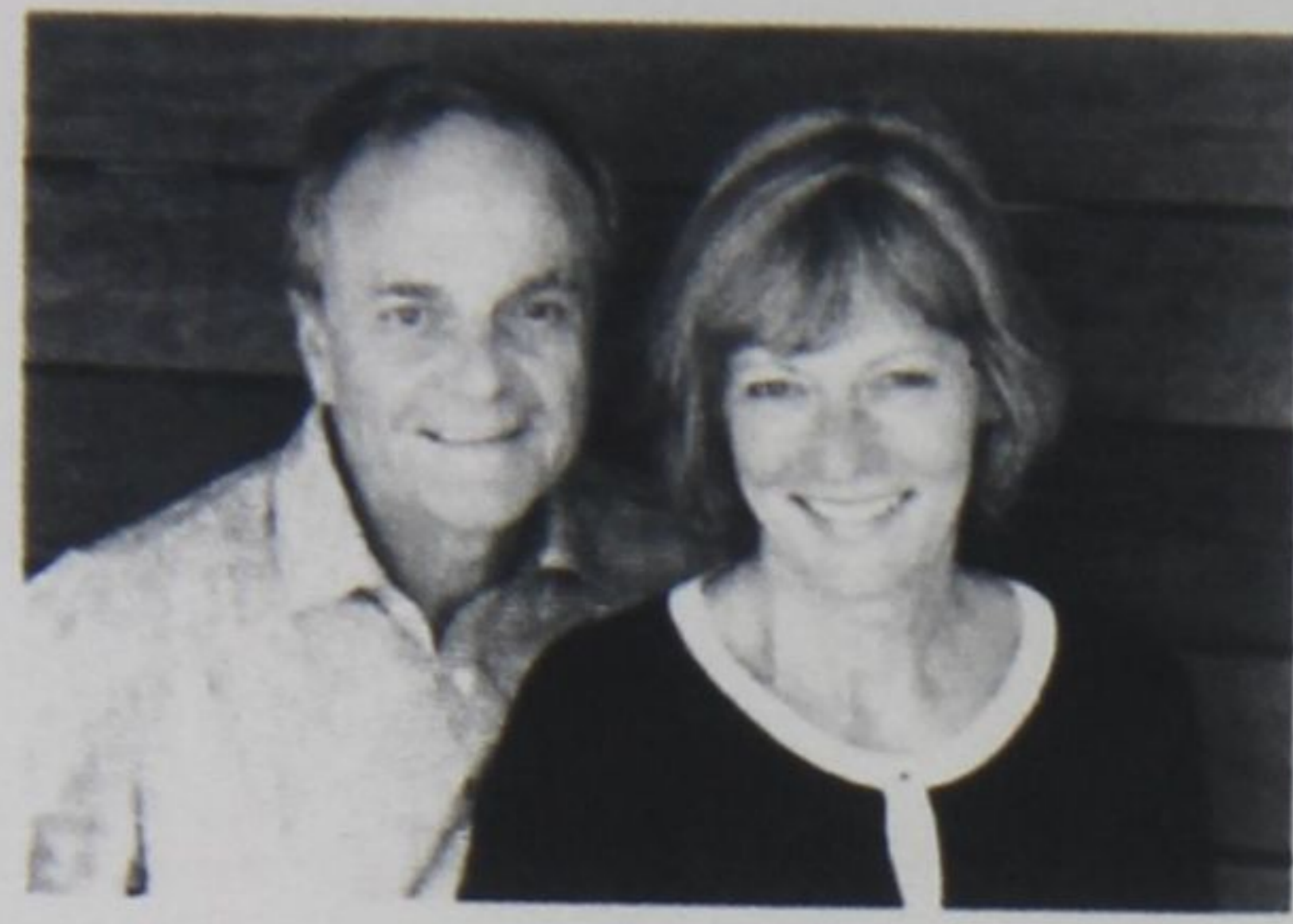
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Parking Fees Cause Concern

By Kate Gilderdale
Stouffville Free Press

As health care costs skyrocket and government funding fails to keep pace, hospitals are forced to look for alternative ways of raising money.

One result of the scramble for funds is the high cost of parking fees, which are increasingly used to offset other hospital operating costs. Concern over the issue has led a group of residents to form the Fair Hospital Parking Charges partnership, a grassroots initiative to increase awareness and seek alternatives to the current policy.

Among those involved is octogenarian Alan Powell, a long-time volunteer at Markham Stouffville Hospital and a strong advocate for the facility. "We should emphasize first and foremost that we do support and appreciate the wonderful work of healing and health care being carried out by the hospitals and long term care providers of our province," said Mr. Powell.

"We believe that a fairer way (than levying parking charges) can be developed to raise the same amount to support the work of the hospitals. This is not really asking the government or the municipality for money. We believe that people would be happy to support the hospital when the parking stress is removed.

Health care coverage for all is part of what makes us Canadian, and imposing high parking fees creates a two-tier system, said fellow campaigner Elizabeth Plashkes. "We

pride ourselves on universal health care access. Tommy Douglas was the father of health care in Canada and he was voted the greatest Canadian of all time."

"If the hospital is raising money for programs in the hospital, why isn't it being funded by the government?" said John Hazlewood, another member of the group. He also pointed out that, for many people, driving is the only option. "A lot of them just can't get to the hospital by public transport from where they live."

And while the hospital uses parking revenue to offset other costs, "the money for a parking ticket goes to the City of Markham," said Mr. Powell. "The parking charges at the hospital should reflect

the parking charges in the community."

Current hospital parking fees range from a minimum \$4 for 30 minutes to a daily maximum of \$17 for 24 hours, with weekly and monthly passes also available. Municipal meter parking in Markham costs \$2 per day.

The land occupied by the hospital was donated by Stouffville philanthropist Art Latham, said Mr. Powell. "I knew Art and have met people who knew him. He gave 50 acres to the Town of Markham and I don't believe this would be his way of doing business."

"Increased stress about parking charges isn't healthy for patients," said Ms. Plashkes. "There's so much anger out there. The people most affected are the ones least capable of dealing with it."

Mr. Powell said that former Markham councillor Dan Horchik, the fourth member of the Fair Hospital Parking Charges group, told him that the most effective way to express concern was to contact your provincial government representative. Meanwhile, the following motion supporting the group's position was passed at a recent council meeting.

"The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville hereby requests that the Province of Ontario reduce and cap at a fair rate the parking charges at Ontario hospitals, including Markham Stouffville Hospital." A similar motion was passed by the City of Markham in November.

On its website the group suggests several possible solutions including a province-wide flat fee that caps charges per visit; the removal of parking charges, with the deficit made up through municipal taxation or parking sponsorships by local corporations; a tax benefit for parking to acknowledge that the fees actually represent a donation to hospital operations.

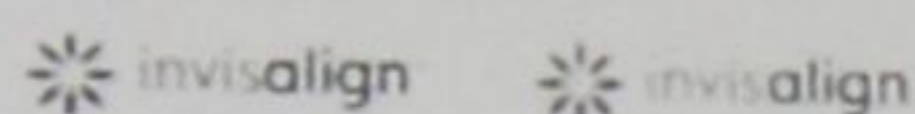
There is no question that the financial constraints faced by health care facilities are the result of funding shortfalls outside their control. As Markham Stouffville Hospital's website explains, "Hospitals are mandated to use parking fees as a revenue source to supplement government funding. Parking revenues help us provide the community with programs and services it needs."

If determination, hard work, good will and faith can make a difference, this partnership has plenty going for it. "Our program is different in that we have a prayer partnership of at least seven different denominations," said Mr. Powell. "We pray that the parking charges will be reduced to a suitable amount and we pray for the doctors, nurses, care-givers, volunteers and staff at the hospitals of Ontario."

For more information and to share your views visit www.fairhospitalparkingcharges.org



Elizabeth Plashkes, John Hazlewood and Alan Powell represent the Fair Hospital Parking Charges partnership along with former Markham councillor Dan Horchik.



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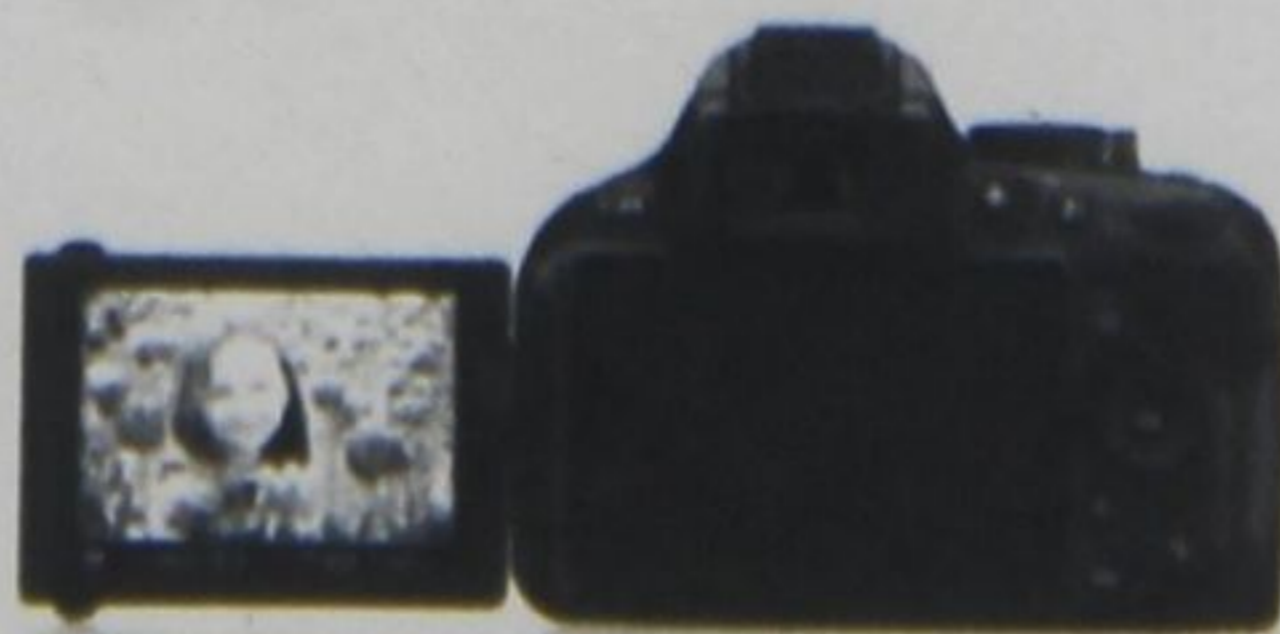
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