

On The Town

Stumped by tree decision

By Pam Mandich



Tree Sculptures

I wish that when councillors don't like an idea, they would just simply say so, rather than employing guesswork.

At the April 17 council meeting, staff asked for direction from council with regards to former Mayor Sherban's program to salvage large trees slated for removal by having artists carve their trunks into sculptures. Councillor Ferdinands said he felt this was not a well thought out initiative and that it would only be four or five years before rot would set in. He said we needed to think of the consequences of such a program. Councillor Smith agreed wholeheartedly. Councillor Hargrave was concerned that vandalism would occur. Council then voted to kill the program and cut down the six trees.

I was curious about this unusual idea, and with a small amount of research and a few phone calls to tree carvers and communities with tree sculptures, I found the following information:

Tree sculptures do not rot in four to five years. While there is no agreement on the exact life of a tree sculpture, I was told it ranges from 10 to 75 years with proper maintenance. The sculpture itself is more or less permanent and can be removed from the tree should the need arise.

Once complete, tree sculptures are not left to rot but are finished with either water based paints or special varnishes to preserve them. Carvings can include everything from animals to mystical creatures to local historical figures. Maintenance of the sculptures requires them be treated with a protective coating anywhere from twice a year to once every three years.

Orangeville has 43 tree sculptures, the last one being added April 30 of this year. The first sculpture was carved in 2002 and is doing well. The Art Walk of Tree Sculptures has been a very successful tourist attraction for that community. To view these wonderful sculptures, simply go to www.orangeville.org. Orangeville has experienced very little vandalism of its tree sculptures—only three or four incidents since the program started.

Tourism London in London, Ontario is about to embark upon a tree sculpture program. Not only has it partnered with a local business to fund the program, it is also partnering with a local agency to engage at-risk youth in the maintenance of the tree sculptures.

John Winston, general manager of Tourism London, who is initiating the tree-sculpture program, says that in his research of other communities with tree sculptures, vandalism has not been reported to be a problem.

The Stouffville program, initiated by former Mayor Sherban, would have been run by the Strawberry Festival, as it was going to be one of the attractions at the festival this year. The festival would have managed the program, and found the sponsors and the artists. It would have even been willing to look after the maintenance. In other words,

this program of public art would not have cost the town a penny. Removal of the six tree stumps that would have been carved will now cost taxpayers about \$900.

To see some of these wonderful tree sculptures and the process by which they are created, visit artist Bobbi Switzer at www.switzersigns.ca/bobbi or artist Robbin Wenzoski at www.geocities.com/aruba692003/ttc1.html. Both sites have pictures of this amazing process.

Sadly, rather than choosing free public art, a unique tourist attraction, the chance to engage our youth in a worthwhile project while showing that we can honour and preserve our heritage, this council chose to cut down and destroy. Given all of the positives that could have come out of this program, one has to wonder what was really being rejected here -- the idea or its source.

Political Kudos

The next time you appear as a delegation before council in committee, make sure to tip your hat and smile at Councillor Smith. He's the reason you are able to be there. Over the past month, council has been changing the town's procedural by-laws. At the April 17 council in committee meeting, the final draft of the procedural by-law was up for discussion. Strangely, in this final draft, delegations (i.e. presentations by public groups) were moved from appearing before council in committee (the night time meeting) to appearing during the daytime council meetings. Councillor Smith was the only council member to stand up and speak for the public's right to access council outside daytime working hours. He strongly believes that daytime meetings would be a problem for many, who work in the day. Councillor Smith seems to understand that it's not just access to council that matters but also access to council in the public arena. He made a motion to amend the bylaw to allow delegations to appear before council in committee and it was accepted.

Finally, a musical round of applause goes to Mayor Emmerson for volunteering his time to MC one of the Music Alive sessions. He was the only politician in town to volunteer to participate in this wonderful celebration of the musical talents of our youth. Sponsored by ArtsLink York Region and co-ordinated by our very own Wayne Hill, Music Alive celebrates and honours the talent of our youth by giving them a forum to perform, learn and grow through music. This year, Music Alive had over 13,000 participants from both our schools and the community. While I would imagine that this kind of thing is outside Mayor Emmerson's comfort zone, kudos to him for stepping up to the plate.

You can email Pam Mandich at pmandich@sympatico.ca.

Town wins Water Smart award

The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville has received the Life Saving Society's prestigious Water Smart Award for 2006. The award acknowledges those who make a strong commitment to drowning prevention education.

"I am very proud of the efforts of town staff to promote drowning prevention education, which is truly a team effort involving operations, reception and aquatic staff," stated director of leisure services Tom Graham. "A provincial award like Water Smart is certainly rep-

resentative of the quality of the town's aquatic programs."

Some of the educational activities the town initiated included promotion at community events; development of new educational and awareness tools for students and the public; accessible and inclusive programming and promotion. The society cited the town as having made an especially impressive effort in the area of water safety education for people with special needs.

St. Brigid supports Starlight Starbright Foundation

By Shelley Poirier

St. Brigid Elementary School invites everyone to their 5th annual Community Fun Fair May 26, which runs 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the school.

St. Brigid believes in giving back to the community and we are working with the Starlight Starbright Children's Foundation to raise funds for a PC Pal for the pediatrics unit of Markham Stouffville Hospital.

The PC Pal is a special, hospital approved laptop preloaded with entertaining and educational software to help raise children's spirits, distract them from their pain and connect them to family and friends. For more information on The Starlight Starbright Foundation and the PC Pal visit www.starlight.org, scroll down to In the News and click on PC Pal.

Join us for a barbecue lunch, cotton candy and carnival games. Purchase raffle tickets for a chance to win one of over 75 themed baskets including Sports "Fan"atic, Scorch The Porch and It's my Party. There

will also be a silent auction table with items donated from St. Brigid families and local businesses.

New this year are a fortune teller, a bouncer, a candy store and a Webkinz booth. Garage sale spots

are also available for \$10 each. Donations and business sponsors are greatly appreciated. For more information please email stbrigidfunfair@hotmail.com or call 905-640-4049.

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Main Street, Stouffville - above the PACE Credit Union.