

Goodbye Bowling Alley, Goodbye Small Town Feel

By Jacqueline Foley

Whether you're eight or 80, chances are you've hit a few pins at the Stouffville Bowling Centre on Main Street. A warm and welcoming community meeting place for over 60 years, the centre has been home to thousands of children's birthday parties, community fundraising events and leagues for the old, the young and those with special needs. Sadly, on May 30, the doors to the bowling alley will close for good, and an important part of our town's history will be lost forever.

In case you haven't heard the news, a new medical centre is being planned where the Stouffville Bowling Centre is now located. The building's owner has asked all current tenants to clear out by the end of the month, including the bowling centre's proprietor of 11 years, John White.

Long-time bowler Tiny Stewart believes that Stouffville is losing a very important social centre. "I started coming here in the sixties when I was at home with my kids," says Tiny who now bowls with a group of ladies every Thursday afternoon. "It was the one night a week I could get out and

socialize with other women. So I'm really going to miss the place. But the thing that really upsets me about losing the centre is that there has been no commitment from the town to put a bowling alley anywhere else. I hear about the money going into the old town hall and talk of a new arena, why not a bowling alley?"

Barb Anderson feels Tiny's pain. Head of the Markham Bowlers, Barb recently took the issue to a council meeting. She spoke about how critical the centre has been for her group of more than 30 bowlers who all have special needs. The Stouffville Bowling Centre is the only bowling alley for miles that can accommodate individuals with physical disabilities. Barb pleaded with council to help save the centre, but to no avail. According to Barb, Mayor Emmerson's response was: "I don't know why you've wasted your time coming here; there's nothing I can do about it." She said Richard Bartley, the councillor for the ward in which the centre resides, said even less.

Barb left the meeting feeling deflated. "We've been coming to the Stouffville Bowling Centre every Sunday for 20 years," says Barb. "For many of our bowlers this is

the one sport they truly excel at. We have two bowlers going to compete in the Ontario Special Olympics this year. And now they're facing having to leave the town to bowl. It's devastating."

Matthew Nighswander is one of these bowlers. Two years ago, at the age of 20, he was named the national champion for pins over average at the 2006 Special Olympics. Matthew started bowling when he was 16 and says he quickly grew to love the sport. You can hear the pride in his voice when he talks about representing Stouffville at the games. Matthew says that the Stouffville Bowling Centre holds many special memories for him. "I started my bowling career here and I've won awards here. I really think that if more people could see our athletes in action they would realize how important bowling is in this town."

John Tait, head of the Stouffville chapter of Youth Bowling Canada (YBC) couldn't agree more. Every Saturday morning for the past 28 years, John has been teaching kids to bowl. An avid bowler in the men's league, John believes that the sport has a

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The Thursday ladies league will have to look elsewhere for a place to bowl when the Stouffville Bowling Centre closes at the end of the month.



Stouffville Bowling Centre is closing its doors on May 30 after more than 60 years.



Stouffville's Youth Bowling Canada group are among many mourning the loss of a town institution that has served young and old, those with special needs and organizations raising funds for charity.

A Day In The Life

By C.L. Tancredi

My name is Michael and I am nine years old.

I live with autism.

It's a rare thing - I've slept through the night. I burst into my mom's room for a hug; then I dart off. It's suddenly imperative that I solve a math problem.

I am quiet, concentrating on a number; without warning, I tear up and down the hallway. I only want to work on my math, but the urge to run is too strong.

In the schoolyard, I am often confused. I don't understand how to be a friend, even though I really want to be. Children are puzzled by the things I do and say; they think I don't want to play with them. After a while, they go away.

In class, I am distracted by the strident insistence of my senses: the buzz of the lights; the aroma of soap on my skin; the taste of my pencil. My trousers feel rough.

There is an impossibly interesting speck of dirt on the floor. I cannot block them out.

My interest in these things is often disruptive; fortunately, I have an adult friend, my EA, to help me with my impulses and keep me safe.

At day's end, I swim or rock climb. These things greatly calm my senses. Sometimes, an understanding friend comes with me - I love to have special people nearby.

At bedtime, my senses continue to relentlessly convey their messages. I take a long time to settle.

Tomorrow, I will face my challenges all over again.

While my brain and nervous system are built differently than that of the typical child, my heart is built the same. So, if you see me or someone like me doing the things we do to cope with autism, please remember to be a friend.

C.K. Tancredi is Michael's mother.

Bowling for Autism

On May 3 at 2 p.m. the York Region Chapter of Autism Ontario is holding a fundraiser at Stouffville Bowling Centre.

Children and young people with autism spectrum and related disorders (ASD), along with their siblings and friends, are invited to participate in a fun day of bowling. "It will be a great social learning opportunity for those with autism, in a friendly and non-competitive environment. There will be prizes for all and a certificate for participation," said Stouffville resident Nicole Ongman, who is on the leadership council of the organization.

"We are asking people to sponsor the event

and they can do so online or by dropping by the bowling alley. Tax receipts will be mailed out for any donation over \$20," said Nicole. "We are also doing a silent auction that day to help raise funds. We hope that people can stop by to put in a bid; it will be a closed bidding system, so they will be able to drop off their bids even prior to the event."

All proceeds will go to A-OK, a summer day camp for young people aged 4 to 21 who have ASD. Visit www.autismontario.com/york for information about Autism Ontario or to pledge online. For more details on the May 3 fundraiser, call Stouffville Bowling Centre at 905-640-1471.

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