



**Talk Of The Town**

**Will Park Plans Encourage Downtown Exodus?**

By Ben Embiricos

Once again, I find myself writing about Memorial Park. The park redevelopment is at a crucial stage. It is expected that a final report, together with recommendations from the town staff, will be presented to council on June 5.

On April 10 town staff hosted a public information night. To see slides from the town's presentation visit [www.townofws.com/park\\_plans.asp](http://www.townofws.com/park_plans.asp) and click on the link. On page 6 of this issue (see Free Opinion), the May editorial highlights the importance of retaining key leisure facilities at the centre of town, to avoid a kind of hollowing out effect.

Looking again at the proposed plans for Memorial Park, it struck me that a similar threat is posed here. Since the redevelopment began, the old sled hill and tennis courts have been removed from the north area of the park, closest to the downtown. At the park's centre, the outdoor pool is to be demolished and a baseball diamond has been removed. Both of the new park plans presented at the April 10 meeting have

clustered almost all of the new family orientated leisure facilities at the south end near Hoover Park Drive.

I understand the need to place some facilities in that area. It is a large space which will be easier to build on. Rob Raycroft, the town's director of Community and Leisure Services, explained that "Memorial Park will be more of a destination than the neighbourhood parks, so we want to include parking space." Again the logical place for parking is near the existing Lebovic Leisure Centre.

But having said all that, the north and centre of the park do not seem to be getting much to replace what was lost. The area east of the creek where the outdoor pool is currently located is referred to in the plans as "Stouffville Commons" and will be the site for the Strawberry Festival. So this will presumably be empty grass for most of the year.

Mr Raycroft said that the plan is to create a "quieter, passive area" in the centre of the park, although he also noted that the children's play structure between the creek and the site of the outdoor pool will remain, as will the new play structure near

the bowling green.

The old heart of the park is a gem – the creek where for generations, Stouffville kids have waded in pursuit of crayfish, the shade from the huge trees and the wonderful picnic shelter built by the Stouffville Lions Club. I would suggest that a better balance to the park redesign would see some of the new play structures added to the north and centre of the park instead of to the south. For the bigger ticket items – the pool/splash pad, rink and so on – I accept that the south may be the best bet.

If there is not much to tempt children to play at the north and centre of the park, then Main Street businesses will suffer. Even more importantly, the beautiful old parts of Memorial Park will be in danger of being underused.

Stouffville now has many good neighbourhood parks for which town and council are due praise, but Memorial Park is something special. Stouffville is a very family friendly town and an over clustering of family facilities at the south end of the park could leave residents of all ages with a bit of a hollow feeling.

**Happy Mothers Day**



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By Glenda de Vries

There's a symbiotic relationship between Stouffville and the northern region of Ghana that many people may be unaware of.

For the past five years, health care professionals, mostly from Stouffville and Uxbridge, have provided medical care to this impoverished area for two weeks a year, while the Ghanaians provide the visiting team with gifts of food, warmth, gratitude and blessings.

It all started about thirty years ago when a young man from Ghana, now known as Dr. David Mensah, got a summer job at the Paisley farm in Stouffville to support himself while he studied at Tyndale University and later U of T. He had nothing more than a few pennies in his pocket, a bible in his hands and a spirit made of steel.

During his stay he married Mr. Paisley's daughter, Brenda, and they had three beautiful daughters. The family left for Northern Ghana to care for the poorest of the poor through an organization called The Northern Empowerment Association (NEA), which Dr. Mensah and a group of students had started before he left for Canada.

NEA is a Ghanaian Christian development organization that works among Ghana's poor to alleviate poverty and transform communities, and its Canadian counterpart is Ghana Rural Integrated Development (GRID). After starting several successful anti-poverty programs in Ghana, Dr. Mensah explained the tremendous health care needs of his people to Dr. Jennifer Wilson from Uxbridge during one of his return visits to Stouffville.

There are only 17 doctors for the 2.5 million people living in this region as opposed to 5,075 doctors for the same number of Canadians. Many of Northern Ghana's district hospitals have no doctors at all. There is only one optometrist and no dentist. The problem is compounded by a shortage of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies. In addition, most individuals cannot afford the \$7 annual fee for health insurance.

Dr. Wilson responded to the call in 2001 by organizing the first team of 24 courageous health care professionals. Since then the team has grown to 48, including a surgical team for Operation Hernia based in the UK.

I participated on the team in November 2011 by serving as a registered nurse alongside fellow Stouffville residents Dr. Sarah Barclay, Dr. Martin McDowell and Mary

Lovatt. The mandate of the Ghana Health Team is to follow Jesus' command to visit the sick and provide medical care until Northern Ghana can supply its own sustainable health care.

Our mobile medical team, including the 100 Ghanaian volunteers, provided medical, surgical, dental and eye care to 10,000 people during our exhausting but highly-rewarding two weeks. Our family physicians and pediatricians prescribed the necessary medications and treatments and our well-stocked pharmacy dispensed the meds, while our nurses cleaned wounds, started IV's and provided health care education.

The hernia team performed 288 procedures, restoring men and women to health, their jobs and their lives. Our eye team provided sight to the blind and partially blind by giving them glasses and medications. Our dental team alleviated much pain and agony and may have even saved some lives.

It is amazing how much good was accomplished in just over two weeks. Although the people who came through our clinics were transformed by our assistance, I believe we were transformed by them as well. We were inspired by the children who were happy and well-behaved, delighting in simple things like an empty water bottle to play with.

They rarely begged, always returned my sunglasses to me after playing with them – even though sunglasses are a rare and treasured commodity – and were eager to assist us by carrying our bags and medical supplies. Although the people of Northern Ghana were very poor, they were generous in their gifts of food, dancing and blessings. One tribe even gave each team member a wooden spoon carving. Ghana and the lovely Ghanaian people will always hold a warm place in our hearts.

Those interested in participating in future trips can visit [www.grid-nea.org](http://www.grid-nea.org) to fill out an application. The team normally provides health care in November but with an election in Ghana in late 2012, it was decided to move the date of the next visit to April 2013.

We welcome donations to this worthy cause. Every dollar donated to GRID is matched by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Glenda de Vries is a freelance writer living in Stouffville. She attends the Community Mennonite Church at Parkview Village. You can reach her at [www.cmchurch.ca](http://www.cmchurch.ca) on the Contact Us form.