



Talk Of The Town

By Ben Embiricos

Later this month town staff is due to report back to council with ideas for an interim solution to the over-crowding at the Silver Jubilee 55 Plus Club on Main Street. This was not the next step hoped for by over one hundred seniors who attended the council meeting on June 5. They had hoped that council would approve plans for the club to be permanently relocated to surplus space at the new town hall building.

At the same meeting though there were presentations on other developments within Leisure Services, and if it wasn't apparent already it became clear that the decision on the seniors' centre was related to just about every other major decision that is faced by this important department. The location of the expanded library, the second indoor pool, a possible outdoor pool and the seniors' centre are all intertwined.

The motion to relocate the seniors' club

to the new town hall was proposed by councillor Richard Bartley and seconded by councillor Hargrave. But councillors Bannon, Hilton, Smith and Ferdinands voted against the proposed move and instead supported a call for staff to prepare further reports on alternative locations for the club.

It was a decision that surprised many. Mayor Emmerson said, "We spoke to the seniors a lot and this was what they told us they wanted. I supported it and I'm disappointed. But the decision has been made and I think in part it's a case of looking under every stone." Consultations with the town had got to an advanced stage including the preparation of detailed floor plans.

I spoke to Councillor Phil Bannon who voted against the move to the town hall. He said, "One of the problems we had was that we were getting mixed information about what the seniors wanted. Some asked for a simple social club and others wanted a bigger range of recreational and cultural activities. If

the members want access to a broad range of leisure services then it would make sense to locate the club at the Leisure Centre not the town hall." This needed to be clarified, he told me.

At the June 5 meeting Councillor Hilton said that the presentation of the Memorial Park plan, the library plan and the report on the seniors' centre together made it clear to her that there were other options for the seniors' centre that should be looked at.

Mr Ferdinands said, "I often get calls from residents about one leisure facility but increasingly it is all about fitting the pieces together to make a whole. There can be a domino effect - a change to one facility means a change for another."

Now that the seniors will not, for the time being at least, relocate to the town hall, what will happen to the extra space? A consultant's report presented at the same June 5 council meeting suggested that moving the library to town hall may be one possibility. Might the

seniors then move into the space vacated at the Leisure Centre?

Might it be that no extension to the Lebovic Leisure Centre will be required if the newly proposed retractable dome swimming pool is built? A late addition to the Memorial Park plan, the pool could be used in summer with the roof retracted and in winter with the roof closed.

On the subject of the seniors' centre, I understand that one interim location being looked at is Latcham Hall. The building is due to be renovated and would seem to be underused.

Whatever happens, of course, some people will be disappointed, but a decision will have to be made looking at the whole rather than the individual parts.

Hopefully the jigsaw can come together in a way that will keep most users and taxpayers happy.

New Beginnings - A Perfect Place

By Kinjal Dagli-Shah

Jorge Caicedo and Angela Contreras are a couple who will never run out of good things to say about Stouffville.

"It's perfect for us, we love it more with each passing day," they said in unison. And they've only lived here a few months, first as renters and soon planning to move into their first home. "We come from Colombia and in our culture, we have to work so hard that there is no time left to spend with family," said Jorge, adding, "Look at me now, I'm back home at 5:30 p.m."

The couple spent a year in the Dominican Republic before landing in Montreal and then, Stouffville. "It was a big trade-off to leave all our family behind but we had to do it for the sake of our children and their future," said Angela, pointing to 5-year-old Sofia and 18-month-old Thomas.

Angela worked as a manager for a big company back in Colombia but once here, she chose to stay at home and be with her kids. "Sofia won a prize for writing in November. And today we got a call from her teacher at Glad Park saying she won the S.K. writing contest. I believe these things are possible because Angela gets to spend time with her children, feed them home cooked food and guide them," said Jorge. "My teacher said I can skip level 13 in reading and go straight to level 14," added Sofia.

Angela agreed with Jorge about staying home. "I remember a time when we would leave Sofia with my mother-in-law and work all day. We would often get calls from her saying she took her first steps or said her first words. We missed those precious moments. But with Thomas, we get to see each milestone for ourselves," she pointed out.

Jorge is an IT consultant whose current project takes him to Mississauga every day. But he doesn't mind the long commute. "We wouldn't have found a town like this anywhere else. I recently wrote a letter to a local politician

about my experiences and he actually phoned me saying he read my letter. That would never happen in Colombia."

The couple enjoys the greenery and the farmers market as well. "We actually have a relationship with the sellers at the farmers market. They welcome us and we talk to them like friends. That, along with fresh vegetables, cannot be found in supermarkets," said Jorge, adding that his love for the town grew when he saw that its residents were mainly professionals and academicians.

"It means our environment will always be growing."

Write to Kinjal at kinjal.dagli@gmail.com





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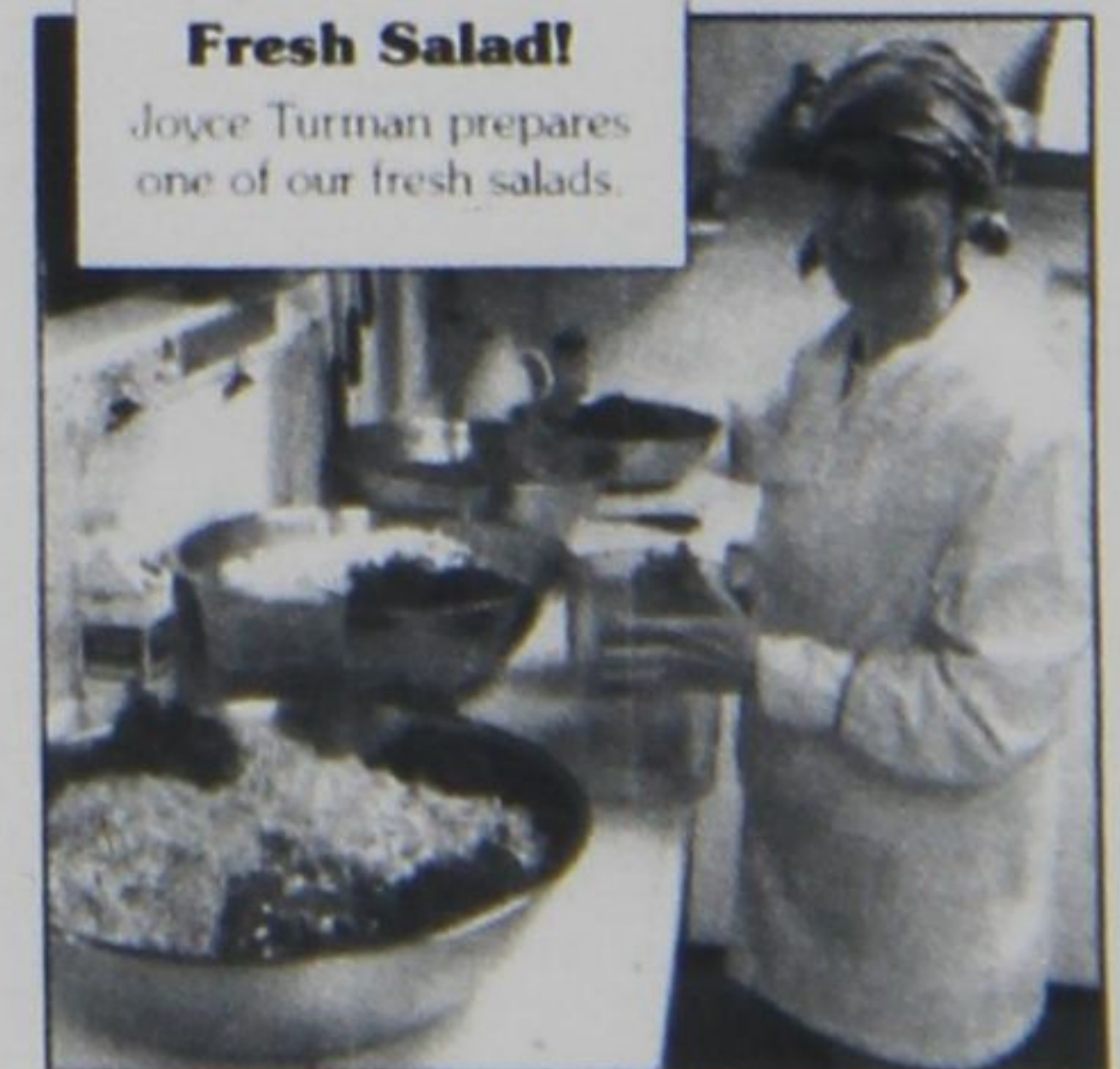
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