

# A Sport For A Lifetime

## Lawn bowling crosses generational lines

by Jill McWhinnie

If you stroll down to Memorial Park on a summer evening, chances are you'll see a number of folks dressed in white, rolling what appear to be bowling balls along the closely cropped grass in the fenced area north of the tennis court. If you watch for a while you'll get a sense of the skill, strategy and fun that make up the sport of lawn bowling, or as it is officially known, bowls.

Bowls has enjoyed a long and colourful history. The game was so popular in Britain in the 1400s that laws were passed prohibiting those whose archery skills were needed to defend the realm from playing bowls. The king was concerned that archers were spending too much time lawn bowling and not enough time practising with the bow and arrow.

In Canada lawn bowling clubs sprang up in many communities in the latter years of the 19th century. Stouffville's green was established in Memorial Park in 1894 and the current clubhouse dates from 1934.

The green is divided into "rinks", so that several games can be played at the same time. Equipment includes a set of four bowls, available in various sizes and weights to best fit the player's hand. Bowls are flattened on one side so as to follow a curved course when rolled. They are typically black or brown; however coloured bowls are now becoming more common. The jack, a small, round, white ball, is used as the target. The object of the game is to score points by rolling the bowl as close to the jack as possible.

It sounds simple, but the art and skill of the game is in gauging the weight of the throw and the appropriate bias of the bowl, taking into account the distance to the jack and the curve of the rink, which can vary considerably on natural grass.

"There's a lot of skill involved,"

said veteran bowler Doris Farthing, who just celebrated her 50th year with the club. "I've done lane bowling and curling, but I prefer lawn bowling. There's more to it."

Club president Bob Stover, who with wife Nancy has been bowling for 11 years, agrees. For him, the appeal of the game is "the opportunity to develop a skill, the use of strategy in play, and the opportunities to compete." There's no doubt that Stouffville bowlers are serious competitors. The pennants and trophies displayed in the clubhouse attest to decades of victories at district, provincial and national levels of competition.

However, despite keen competition, the civility which accompanies bowls play is refreshing. Teams shake hands before the game and wish each other "good bowling". The game concludes with a handshake and the compliment "good game." Refreshments are then served in the clubhouse, giving members the opportunity to socialize, and in the case of new bowlers, get better acquainted with long time members.

"Clubs develop social connections that make people want to come back," said Kevin Penny, executive director of Bowls Canada, the national organization dedicated to the promotion of lawn bowling. There are currently 260 lawn bowling clubs and 15,000 members in Canada. Despite the fact that lawn bowling "often flies below the radar until people are in their mid-40s," Mr. Penny sees a solid future for bowls.

"The cost to enter is low compared to many other sports, particularly for family play. And because it is not physically strenuous, you could lawn bowl in the evening and then still have enough energy left for summer hockey."

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Members of Stouffville's Lawn Bowling Club participate in a tournament during this year's Strawberry Festival.

lawn bowler can be internationally competitive in eight to 10 years", said Mr. Penny, citing the example of 22-year-old Hanover native Ryan Bester, a world champion in 2005. Mr. Penny encourages clubs to introduce high school students to the sport "so that they can see what the game's about. Even if they don't take immediate interest, they often return a few years later."

In June the Stouffville club hosted a workshop for 20 high school students. "We would like to engage youth in significant numbers," said Mr. Stover. "Two years ago we hosted a very successful event, inviting the children and grandchildren of members to come and try the game."

Mr. Penny sees this aspect of bowls as one of its key strengths. "There are several father/son and father/daughter combinations in international tournament play. In what other sport would you see two family members of different generations playing in the same tournament, on the same team?"

Mr. Stover sees the growth of the town as an opportunity for the club to raise its profile and attract new members of all ages. "There's a big market out there. We want to tap into it."

Mr. Penny predicts that bowls, now included in the Commonwealth Games, will one day become an Olympic sport. Given Stouffville's long and distinguished history in the game, a lawn bowler from our town may one day bring home the Olympic lawn bowling medal.

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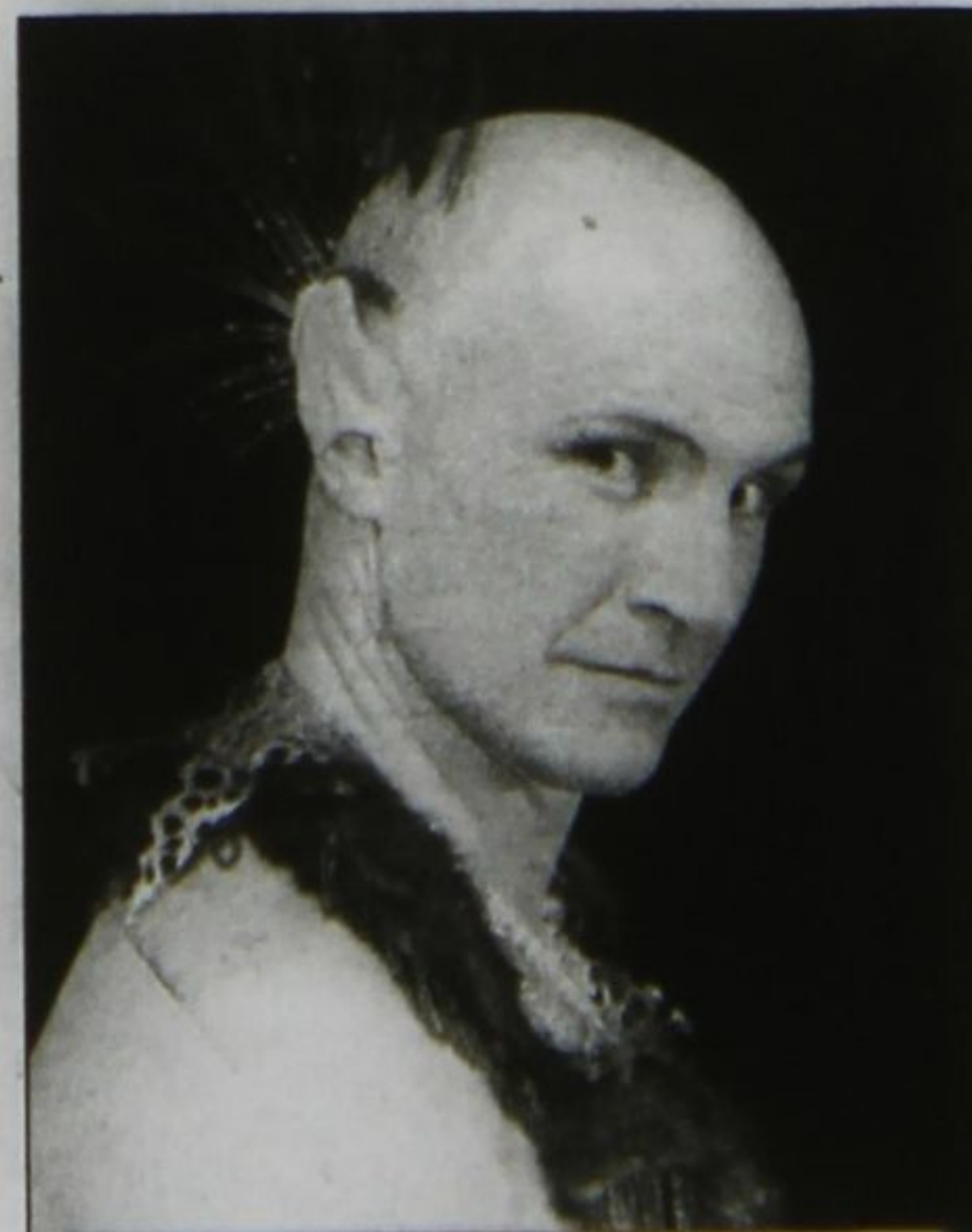
By Kate Gilderale  
Stouffville Free Press

Motus O is holding a sweaty summer dance party to raise funds for its newest production, A Christmas Carol, which will debut at Markham Theatre Dec. 16.

The fundraiser, which takes place Aug. 11 at Cedar Grove Community Centre in Markham, starts at 7 p.m. and includes snacks, desserts, coffee, tea, and the chance to dance your face off to fabulous music spanning the past five decades. James and Justin Croker will provide DJ services and there will be a cash bar.

Tickets are \$15 for adults, \$10 for youth aged 12 to 19 and \$5 for children under 12. There will be a 50/50 cash draw and beautiful Motus O calendars for sale at the event.

Tickets are available by calling Bonnie at 905-471-0075 or Motus O at 905-640-8647. All funds raised will receive a matching grant through the Ontario Arts Foundation.



Motus O artistic director, dancer and dance party DJ James Croker as Puck in the company's production of A Midsummer Night's Dream

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