



McWhinnie's World

In Praise Of Community Newspapers

By Jill McWhinnie

In Thornton Wilder's classic play, *Our Town*, there is a scene in which the stage manager character in the play tells the audience how a copy of the local paper will be placed into a new bank's cornerstone to provide a record to future generations of "the way we were in the provinces north of New York at the beginning of the twentieth century, in our growing up and in our marrying, and our living and our dying."

There's a similar time capsule at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Library; microfiche rolls of the *Stouffville Tribune*, dating back to the early 1900s. I often scroll through these records for research on items of personal interest.

Decades spin by in seconds: Council

news, sports events, muddy photographs of people long dead who once walked the same streets we do now, advertisements for "ultramodern" cars and appliances long since consigned to the scrap heap. I never fail to be grateful to whoever wrote those words or took those pictures or placed those ads since there in those brittle little rolls is the history of our town – who we were, what we bought, what we did for fun during the past 100 years.

There's no doubt local papers have played a significant role in their communities. But what of the future? How will they fare in this world of internet news, Facebook, Twitter, and innovations such as e-readers that will soon provide all the printed material since Gutenberg online?

"Community newspapers are surviving

and will continue to survive," said Don MacLeod, a 20 year veteran of the newspaper business who has owned and published a number of local papers, including the *Port Perry Star* and *Whitchurch-Stouffville This Month*. He recalls the latter as "a fun newspaper, that printed all good news." He sees this approach as one of the reasons for the success of community newspapers.

"Community papers focus on interesting people and events in town. They keep people up to date on local politics and issues. People read the local paper to find out what's going on in the community," said Don.

It also showcases local schools, sports teams and organizations. "There's nothing more rewarding for a parent than to be able to say 'Did you see my kid's picture in the paper this week?' You can bet that picture is going into a scrapbook or photo album so there's a permanent record of that precious moment in time."

A recent poll by the Canadian Newspaper Association reported that community newspapers are read by 74 per cent of Canadians each week. Yet despite this encouraging statistic, Don admits that even community papers need to be aware of the increasing presence of the electronic future.

"The younger generation is not reading newspapers like we did growing up. I remember sitting in a meeting about two years ago where the 27-year-old head of the internet news division announced to the 45-year-olds in the room that he had never read a newspaper – everything he needed was on the internet."

But Don is confident that "the small town

newspaper still has a lot of life left in it. One of the major roles of the community paper is to advertise local businesses, which are increasingly positioned to benefit from the rapidly growing interest in shopping, buying and eating local. I've never looked at advertising just as advertising. It's just as interesting as the stories beside it."

So next time you pick up one of our local papers, have a good look at the ads and think about the stories behind them. The folks advertising there may be your friends or neighbours. The ads may be for businesses which have been here for generations, or for a brand new entrepreneur with a dream of providing a new service or product to the community.

And while you're at it, have a look at those sports pictures, even if they aren't your kids. Then read the reviews of live performances and art shows. And don't forget the notices of births and deaths, as the town bids farewell to old friends and celebrates the arrival of new life. We need the local paper for all those reasons, but perhaps mainly because stitched together in its pages is a record of the fabric of daily life in our community.

And maybe someday, in a hundred years or so, someone will find a tiny memory chip containing all the printed issues of the *Stouffville Free Press*, which will tell them the way we were in a small town north of Toronto at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in our growing up and our marrying, in our living and our dying.

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 Our hostess will bring gifts and greetings, along with helpful community information.
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Leisure Services

FALL AND WINTER PROGRAM REGISTRATION HAS STARTED

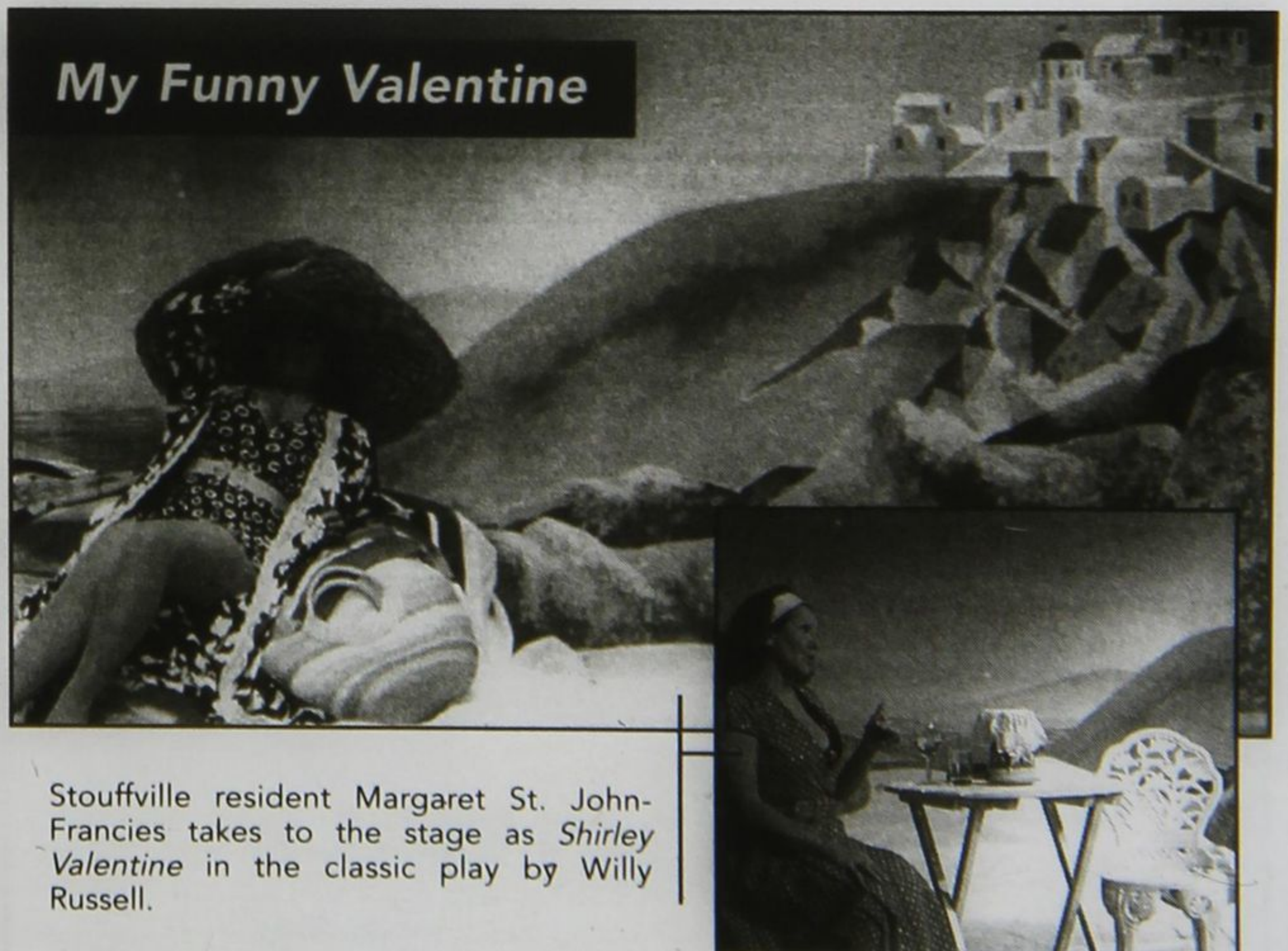
Programs begin the week of September 21. Programs for preschool to seniors to Families include Swimming, Specialty Fitness, Arts, Sports, Camps and PD Day Activities (first one is September 25).

APPLICATIONS ARE ALSO BEING ACCEPTED FOR:

- **Play Buddies**, a great way to volunteer and assist a special needs child integrate into our programs as well as the adapted aquatics program.
- **Mayor's Youth Council**, providing opportunities for youth to be engaged and have a voice in the community. First meeting is at Stouffville Arena, September 17, 4:30pm

For more information, go to www.townofws.com or call 905.642.PLAY(7529)

TOWN OF WHITCHURCHSTOUFFVILLE LEISURE SERVICES



My Funny Valentine

Stouffville resident Margaret St. John-Francies takes to the stage as *Shirley Valentine* in the classic play by Willy Russell.

Stouffville resident Margaret St. John-Francies stars in the one-woman play *Shirley Valentine* which runs at Herongate Barn Theatre until Sept. 19.

The play, by Willy Russell, premiered in Liverpool, England in 1986 and opened in London's West End two years later to great acclaim. A film version starring Pauline Collins was released in 1989.

Shirley Valentine is the story of a middle-aged housewife who feels life is passing her by. She spends much of her time talking to the wall and cooking for her dour and unappreciative husband, and when a friend invites her on a two-week vacation to Greece,

she leaves a note for her husband and takes off. Her journey of self-discovery is both hilarious and poignant and will resonate with anyone who has ever wondered where their life is going.

"It makes you laugh and cry at the same time," said Margaret. "And as an actress it is a magical piece to work with. I have the audience in the palm of my hand through the entire play. The lines are so poignant. Sometimes it makes me shudder how true they are. And it speaks to us all, not just women, but certainly men too."

For more information visit www.herongate.com or call 905-472-3085.