

OPINION

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COLUMNS

Down to the wire in feisty Markham-Stouffville

How did the conversations go around your Thanksgiving dinner table – assuming you celebrated the greatest non-sectarian pig-out this side of Festivus – Stouffville?

Was it Jane Philpott vs Paul Calandra and/or Justin Trudeau against Stephen Harper at the harvest table? Or did the buns and gravy really start flying when you delved into John Gibbons' managerial moves or someone's dissertation on Munenori Kawasaki wildest dance steps?

(For the record, I like it when you bust out the hands-over-the-face number, Muni. I digress.)

When you weren't inhaling turkey and pie, many of you were voting. I saw you lined up on the stairs of the Stouffville Arena much of the weekend.

Many voters said they waited 45 minutes, while others breezed in and out. Timing was everything. (It took me eight minutes Saturday night, just prior to puck drop at the Stouffville Spirit game going on in the same complex.)

Further to the record, I've voted for every mainstream party in this land while living in three Ontario communities during the past 40 years.

I've never belonged to a political party.

In the spirit of disclosure, a family member did run, unsuccessfully, for the Conservatives in the Hamilton area.

And a cousin was an Ontario NDP MPP for 19 years, including three-plus years as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

Makes sense then, sort of, that during this record-long election campaign, I've been called everything from the second coming of "that Harper" to "a biased socialist". There's no middle ground, apparently.

The name-calling is new to me after covering about



Off The Top

with *Jim Mason*

20 elections during 33 years in this community. Times are tense. Four more sleeps.

It's gotta be a product of a tight race between the Liberals and Conservatives here in Markham-Stouffville and right across this great land.

We Canadians are suddenly passionate about something other than the Stanley Cup or who brews a better dark roast, Tim Hortons or McDonald's.

Good on you.

It's the kind of momentum the volunteers behind The Sun-Tribune's Big 5-0 Project were after ahead of last year's municipal election.

It's the kind of race we predicted. Calandra and Philpott are both extremely well known and popular in certain circles.

The race is especially magnified here in Stouffville, home town to all four candidates in this new riding.

Shameless plug time: For election-night coverage of this riding, we invite you to yorkregion.com

Our reporters and photographers will be at the polls and talking to the candidates on Monday.

Traffic, even in burgeoning Stouffville, shouldn't be an issue.

The victory parties – how can there be more than one? – for the big two candidates are four kilometres apart.

Jim Mason is editor of The Sun-Tribune. Follow him on Twitter @stouffeditor

'Deputy mayor' toast of town

Mayor Justin Altmann has etched a smile on the face of a nine-year-old Whitchurch-Stouffville boy that will never wear thin.

At a recent assembly of town staff and ratepayers, he presented Antwon Leadbetter of Cherry Street with a medal of honour and an accompanying plaque. He also named him deputy mayor-for-a-day.

The plaque's inscription reads: "On behalf of the mayor, we extend congratulations to deputy-mayor Antwon Leadbetter on the occasion of his 9th birthday". The tablet, beautifully framed, bears the signatures of Mayor Altmann and clerk Michele Kennedy.

The guest of honour, a Grade 4 student at Notre Dame Catholic Elementary School in Newmarket, has cerebral palsy, autism and other health issues that doctors describe as "complex".

He was adopted by Mark and Roseann Leadbetter when only 15-months old. The parents then resided in northern Richmond Hill, moving to the Vivian community seven years ago.

At the time of adoption, Mark and Roseann were aware of Antwon's cerebral palsy.

"This wasn't a concern," says Roseann, "out of 300 clips, he was our choice and we've never been sorry." She describes Antwon as "a sweet, fun-loving, kind-hearted, spiritual little boy".

And Mayor Altmann agrees.

He's a great kid," he enthuses.

The two had the pleasure of meeting when leaders and members of the Ballantrae Scouts, including Antwon, visited Altmann's office. The mayor took them on a tour of the municipal building and he



Roaming Around

with *Jim Thomas*

later was made an honorary associate of the company.

After learning of his upcoming birthday, the mayor invited Antwon and his parents to a meeting of council.

Prior to their arrival, Altmann purchased 16 birthday cards and distributed them among various town departments where all were appropriately signed.

All then joined in singing Happy Birthday.

'Everyone he speaks

with becomes an

instant friend.'

But the tributes didn't end there. In addition to the cards, Antwon received a town sweater, two caps, a mug and other treasures including the medal of honour and plaque.

"He was so excited when he saw my chain of office, I decided to give him one of his own," the mayor said.

Roseann was choked with emotion in attempting to describe the event.

"It was pretty special," she said, "difficult to put into words. Truth is, it was heart-warming that someone at our mayor's level would go so far as to acknowledge Antwon's distinctive day. We were very pleased."

Antwon, she explains, loves to receive mail and while his birthday is now several weeks past, cards will still be appreciated. His address is 4984 Cherry St., Stouffville, Ont., L4A 7X4.

"He's been a pure joy," she says, "a God-send to us ever since his adoption. He's sure to melt the hearts of anyone who has an opportunity to meet him."

In spite of numerous health problems, his mother says he never complains. "He's more concerned about others than himself," she notes. "Everyone he speaks with becomes an instant friend."

In order to attend school, a bus picks him up every weekday at 7:30 a.m., and returns him home at 2:20 p.m. His favourite subjects are science and religion.

In sports, he participates in track and field. He also plays soccer with an all-boys team in Stouffville and enjoys his association with the Ballantrae Scouts. His father drives him to weekly Boy Scout get-togethers at the Ballantrae Community Centre then waits to bring him home.

A ride in a monster truck highlighted his visit to Markham Fair. When older, he'd like to drive one, he says. He'd call it "Autistic Thunder". A dream career is that of a paramedic.

Mayor Altmann admits it's difficult for young people to take an interest in the political side of community life. Antwon and the other Boy Scouts seemed fascinated, he said.

"The mayor even shook my hand," said Antwon.

Asked if in the future he'd like to hold this position, Antwon tactfully replied: "I'll think about it."

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.