



Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville workers Mike Holmes (left) and James McConkey keep the sidewalk clear while arborist Mark Carroll (right photo) trims branches on Main Street in advance of the Strawberry Festival this week.



STAFF PHOTOS/ALI RAZA

# 25,000 expected during 32nd Strawberry Festival weekend

BY ALI RAZA  
aliraza@yrmg.com

Canada turns 149 tomorrow, and Stouffville's celebrating our nation's birthday with the 32nd annual Strawberry Festival.

From today through Sunday, residents and visitors alike can take advantage of the countless activities and events planned for the weekend. Fireworks are set for Friday night at dusk in Memorial Park.

Approximately 25,000 people are expected to attend throughout the weekend.

Though some events start as early as Thursday, the opening ceremony commences Friday evening at 6 p.m. before Canada Day festivities.

"Last year when Canada Day was on Wednesday, everyone left after fireworks because the next day was a working day," said festival co-chairperson Ker-Yng Pang. "But this year it's on a Friday, so the band will stay longer, people can hang out longer in the park, and food vendors will be open until 11:30 p.m."

A plaque dedicated to First World War pilot Captain

Roy Brown will be unveiled as well as the presentation of The Sun-Tribune's Citizen of the Year (Smiley and Joanne George) and Sports person of the Year (Wendy Jaksie) awards.

Habitat for Humanity is also set to make an announcement of a new building on Main Street with Mayor Justin Altmann at 1:30 p.m. on Saturday at its booth on Park Drive.

Catch Gladys Clarkson's Strawberry Pie and Jam Contest the morning of Canada Day at 9 a.m., results and awards will be revealed later at 2 p.m.

The Black Board Blues Band will perform after the ceremony at 7 p.m. until it's time for fireworks.

As events are spread across downtown Stouffville, some roads will be closed or sectioned off. They include Main Street, Park Drive and Burkholder Street; Main Street will be closed Saturday between Park Drive and the GO station for the popular street sale.

For a full schedule and more, visit [www.strawberryfestival.ca](http://www.strawberryfestival.ca)

## CRAFTER, FESTIVAL DISAGREE OVER FEES

Do vendors pay too much for a booth at the Strawberry Festival?

Festival co-chair Ker-Yng Pang will tell you that the festival's vendor fees are "competitive" but resident and small business owner Kim Harvey would tell you otherwise.

"I have never seen a festival increase prices that fast on their booth fees, it's the new management," Harvey said. "They don't realize what they're doing to small businesses; festivals thrive up and die when they treat small business that way."

But as the Strawberry Festival opens for its 32nd year in Stouffville, Pang says there are no signs that the festival is shriveling up.

"We did research, we compared fees to festivals our size, we had meetings to talk about the fee structure," Pang said. "We believe our rates are competitive; this wasn't based on a whim."

Vendor fees are charged based on four categories. The first category, crafters, is meant for vendors who sell handcrafted and homemade goods (Harvey qualifies as a crafter). The second category, businesses, is meant for vendors that sell manufactured goods and services. The third is Main Street businesses affected by the road closure and the fourth is not-for-profits.

Crafters are charged \$175 per booth per day; businesses are charged \$300 per booth per day. Main Street vendors are charged \$175 per booth per day and not-for-profits get the lowest rate at \$40 per booth per day.

These fees are different from last year when crafters and businesses were lumped into the same category.

"The biggest price adjustment would be between crafters and businesses," Pang said. "In previous years, if you were a busi-

ness, you'd be paying the same price as a crafter."

"This year, we want to encourage crafters, to show our support for them," she added.

But Harvey isn't satisfied with explanations she's received from the festival committee. Having spoken to two members of the committee, she believes she's only received excuses.

"When I talked to them, they told me they lost sponsors," Harvey said. "I was told they're trying to increase the number of artisans, but they're still outpricing themselves."

Harvey, having been a vendor at Kempenfest in Barrie, said she paid \$400 for three days there. Three days at the Strawberry Festival as a crafter would cost \$525.

As a lifelong Stouffville resident, Harvey has spoken to many vendors and business owners, including many more on social media.

With the division of crafters and businesses, Pang says there are 63 registered vendors in the crafters category and 63 in the business category, bringing the total number to 126.

Compare that with last year, when there were 127 crafters and businesses (under the same category, and thus the same rate), and it appears the fees haven't significantly impacted vendor participation.

Last year's rates were \$125 per booth per day, for both crafters and businesses, which was the early-bird rate for crafters this year. Businesses did not have an early bird rate this year.

Harvey will still sell her homemade goods at the festival, but is worried about the future of the festival.

"They said they got 200 people so people don't mind," she said. "But they don't understand market research; those same people won't come back next year, because they'll realize they didn't make any money."

- Ali Raza



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Declan John of Varsity Tents hammers a stake prior to the raising of the festival's marquee tent yesterday.

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