

OPINION

Stouffville Sun-Tribune

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MANAGING EDITOR
Jim Mason
jmason@yrmg.com

**ADVERTISING
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Mara Sepe
msepe@yrmg.com

**CIRCULATION
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Daphne Lawrie
dlawrie@yrmg.com

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COLUMNS

Got poutine? Eating our way through festival weekend

Strap on the feed bag, Stouffville.

And one of those bibs with the built-in plastic trough for good measure. Toss in a large pack of Wet-Naps and we're golden.

We're eating our way through the 32nd annual Whitchurch-Stouffville Strawberry Festival. One day at a time. Meal by meal.

Let's pretend we've got our own show on the Food Network for the next four days. I'll be Guy Fieri. That should justify near constant consumption of edible products that are often battered and served up on paper plates or napkins.

You don't wear white after Labour Day and you never don it during our long-weekend food tour, lest you return looking like you went to a paint ball facility and lost the fight, badly.

No time to fast. We begin tonight (4:30 to 7:30 p.m.) with the granddaddy of all things outdoors and gastronomic in Stouffville. **The Lions Club's beef barbecue** pre-dates the festival by many a year. People even older than me – yes, they do exist – call it an annual end-of-school tradition on the last Thursday of June dating back to at least the 1950s.

It's cafeteria-style dining under the Memorial Park picnic shelter (another Lions' project). Think Soup Nazi from Seinfeld without the tension. Feel free to kibitz with the service club's volunteers while they dish up your meal.

Saturday will be a marathon. We start early with the **pancake breakfast** (8 to 10 a.m.) outside Latcham Hall in Memorial Park. Serving us are local MP Jane Philpott, MPP Helena Jaczek and Mayor Justin Altmann. Philpott and Jaczek may be cabinet ministers from Monday to Friday but today they are in the culinary industry. It's all for a good cause and it's free – but speaking of all things edible, donations of non-perishable foods



Off The Top
with Jim Mason

for the Whitchurch-Stouffville Food Bank will be appreciated.

Napping is accepted on our food tour but we encourage a morning of cardio, walking the festival from the tracks to Park Drive and back into Memorial Park.

We'll reconvene on something new and appropriately named **Food Street**, which is actually Burkholder Street in the park, nicely relabelled during the festival.

Although there will be food booths sprinkled throughout the festival area, organizers want you to consider this area your own personal food court.

They hope you have dinner in the park before the Friday night fireworks and the Jack de Keyzer show on Saturday.

Think Food Building at the CNE. Some of the choices: deep-fried Mars bars, funnel cakes, blooming onions, Latin offerings, Caribbean cuisine, shawarma, vegan curries and poutine.

What better way to finish off the festival of eating then at the **strawberry social** on Sunday (noon) at the marquee tent? It's free. It's seasonal. It's Stouffville.

See you there. Bibs in place.

(And don't forget to support our local restaurants on Main Street and beyond year round.)

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

PUBLISHER *Dana Robbins*

GENERAL MANAGER *Shaun Sauve*

**REGIONAL EDITOR-IN-CHIEF,
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Stouffville
Sun-Tribune

6290 Main St.
 Stouffville, ON. L4A 1G7
 www.yorkregion.com

Jim's Strawberry Festival picks

It's Strawberry Festival weekend. Or is it Strawberry Festival long weekend?

Since its scheduled beginning was last night and its conclusion is Sunday afternoon, the big event actually spans five days rather than four, at least unofficially.

But does it matter? The big show, now in its 32nd year, is our town's largest crowd-drawer which, weather permitting, temporarily increases our population by 25,000 visitors. Organizers say it's the second-largest event in York Region.

If history repeats itself, Saturday's throng between Edward Street and Park Drive might possibly tempt some daredevil to walk the distance atop human heads, so huge could be the crush.

If memory serves me rightly, the occasion had its beginning as a Canada Day celebration that morphed to include a magic festival honouring Stouffville's slight-of-hand artist, the late Arthur Latcham.

In 1984, it was the bicentennial festival, in honour of Ontario's 200th birthday.

Subsequently, and briefly, it was to be the flea festival, related to Stouffville's Country Market. That didn't happen.

Instead, with so many area agriculturalists producing multi-acres of juicy red berries, the connection was almost automatic – let's call it the Strawberry Festival. The festival nameplate has continued more than three decades. With, hopefully, many more years to come.

As a former committee member, I'm well aware a show of this size doesn't just happen. It involves many meetings and countless hours of diligent work. A tip of the hat to co-chairs Nancy Matheson and Ker-Yng Pan, board of directors Judi Cranley, Liz Fraser,



Roaming Around
with Jim Thomas

Laura Gallo and 22 committee volunteers for assuming so huge a task. Hopefully, at the end of the day, the festival's success will be their rewards.

So what on the agenda excites you the most? Although the events' schedule offers something for everyone, there are 'different strokes for different folks'. My favourites follow:

• **Thursday:** While not an expert when it comes to lawn bowling, I'll surely be a spectator when Stouffville hosts its annual festival tournament from 1 to 9 p.m. My problem, the last time I tried, I only tested the strength of the baseboards on the far side of the green. With some patience and practice I can surely do better.

The Lions' beef barbecue is an absolute must. Servings begin at 4:30 and conclude when all participants have had their fill. The ticket price is a genuine bargain, especially for we seniors. The social aspect of the event is extremely satisfying also.

• **Friday:** The Gladys Clarkson Strawberry Pie and Jam Contest is back with entries received at Latcham Hall between 9 and 11 a.m. Judging begins at 11. While, for me, the jam category would be fitting, a strawberry pie would be more appropriate.

Talented members of Stouffville's Academy of Dance and Music will perform in the marquee tent at 10:30 a.m. with the Laya Bhava Dancers at 12:15 p.m.

I, unfortunately missed the Craze-Crew Stunt Team last year. Spectacular performances are planned at 1, 2:30 and 4 p.m. The site location is Park Drive and Burkholder Street.

A Friday highlight is the festival's 6 p.m. official opening. A plaque honouring RAF First World War ace, Capt. Roy Brown and hopefully his publicist, 11-year-old Glad Park public school student Nadine Carter, whose persistence led to Capt. Brown's rightful recognition, will take place at the bandshell. Our town's Citizens of the Year (Smiley and Joanne George) and Sports Person of the Year (Wendy Jacksie) will also be recognized. The always popular Black Board Blues Band will be back on stage from 7 to 11:30 p.m., with colourful fireworks at dusk.

• **Saturday:** Personal choices include a Pancake Breakfast, (8-10 a.m.); Baby Show, (9-11 a.m.); World War 1 Biplane Fly-Past, (10:45 a.m.); Rubber Ducky Races, (10 a.m.-4:30 p.m.); Shout Sister Choir, (12 noon and 1:30 p.m.); Craze-Crew Stunt Team, (11:30 a.m.; 2:30 and 4 p.m.) and a live band concert (8-12 p.m.). The mainstream of activity will occur on Main St., from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

• **Sunday:** The Ecumenical Church Service, hosted by the Stouffville Ministerial Association, will take over the marquee tent from 10:30 a.m. until noon with Rev. Joan Masterton the speaker. A strawberry social will follow.

Hope to see you there.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 65 years.