

Tough task: No skeletons in Jim Mason's closet

It was community at its best. A gathering of old Stouffville and beyond.

While the reverencing of recently retired Sun-Tribune editor Jim Mason was supposedly a roast, speaker after speaker found it difficult to execute the fault-finding role, so extensive has been the guest of honour's community contributions.

Even check-backs into prime examples of boyhood revelry during growing-up days in Thunder Bay produced few instances of wrongdoing worthy of poster placements or fingerprinting.

No skeletons in this Jim's closet.

Still, several scraped the bottom of the barrel and came up with diminutive anecdotes that had the sold-out Legion hall crowd rolling in the aisles.

Like reminiscences provided by Jim and Char-



JIM THOMAS
Roaming Around

lene's youngest daughter, Jennifer, that described a hockey game when her dad accidentally fell over the boards. His team was handed a two-minute penalty for having too many men on the ice. Other speakers included - MP Jane Philpott via video, MPP Helena Jaczek, past mayors Fran Sainsbury and Wayne Emmerson, current mayor Justin Altmann, retired hockey star Keith Acton, Bruce Stapley and Kate Gilderdale of the Stouffville Free Press, Ron Schell Gary Bouwmeister, Scott Bur-

rows and myself.

David Barthau, alluring in a white tuxedo and black bow tie, ably served as master of ceremonies.

The event was hosted by the Stouffville Lions Club. Jim Mason, it was announced, is the holder of the Lions' prestigious Melvin Jones Award, the only non-member to achieve this distinction in the organization's history.

During the night, several gifts were presented, including a framed congratulatory plaque from Altmann.

Observed by the audience, however, was the fact only three of seven members of town council attended. Safe to say the missing links in the political chain didn't go unnoticed.

The evening's MC praised co-operation received from several prime supporters, including Patrick Lannigan of

the Stouffville Theatre Company and Bruce Stapley of the Stouffville Free Press. An appropriate start to proceedings was the harmonious rendition of Mr. Sandman, (Mr. Mason) by a Theatre Co. trio, billing themselves as The Masonettes Songsters - Marianne Lannigan, Michelle Charrette and Christine Fraser. Their redefining of the once-popular 50s tune was enthusiastically acclaimed.

I was given the opportunity to rain on Jim's parade, but because of a long-standing friendship, refused to do so. However, one mildly irritating burr is still attached to my saddle.

Over a period of nearly three decades, I contributed 1,404 columns to his newspaper. Out of this number only one was rejected. The cause was related to refurbish-

ing of the age-old Stanley Theatre into what is now Lebovic Centre for Arts and Entertainment on Civic Avenue. Under cover of darkness, while no one was watching, I vaulted the shoulder-high fence and picked up a discarded brick. The reason? I wished to retain it as a keepsake in my room of memories. In doing so, I obviously committed a major faux pas, at least in Jim Mason's mind. After editing my daring escapade in a completed column, he was on the phone.

"We can't use it," he said.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because you took the brick without permission," he replied.

"But it's only one brick," I weakly protested. "There were thousands from which to choose."

"Doesn't matter," he continued. "It wasn't

yours to take."

While he refrained from using the word 'steal', I knew it was on the tip of his tongue.

"You'll have to compose a replacement (column)," he stated. Which I did, even though the substitute was well past my Sunday midnight deadline.

But that was the Jim Mason we all knew and still know - sincere, honest and trustworthy even down to a lowly leftover brick, which, by the way, I still possess.

Jim, in his rebuttal, recalled the day he came to town.

"Stouffville," he said. "I couldn't spell it or pronounce it. I only knew it had a flea market."

His concluding remarks struck a chord: "Keep on doing what you do and give back. Welcome other people the way you welcomed me."



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