

Competition Heats Up For Chili Cook-Off

On March 22 at 6 p.m. EastRidge Church will host the 6th annual Chili Cook-off in support of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Emergency Care Fund.

If you have a special chili recipe that will make the world a better, warmer place, you are invited to stir things up for a chance to win a fun prize and help an excellent cause. Awards will be given in the following categories: most unique ingredients, hottest, vegetarian, traditional and people's choice.

Entries must be received by March 19. Send an email to office@eastridge.ca with the header Chili Cook-Off, send a fax to 905-640-3925 or call 905-640-3988.



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Bannon First To Make Case In Mayoral Race

By Ben Embircos

Ward 2 councillor Phil Bannon was the first to throw his hat into the ring and seek the job of mayor following Mayor Emmerson's decision not to run in October.

I spoke recently with Mr. Bannon to learn more about his platform and to discuss his record as a member of council.

He has represented Ward 2, which includes Ballantrae and Musselman's Lake, since 2003. He had a 32 year career in law enforcement with the Toronto police in addition to spending six years in managerial positions in the transport business. He secured the Ontario Conservative nomination for the 2003 provincial election, but ultimately lost to current Liberal MPP Helena Jaczek.

Of his decision to seek the mayor's chair, he said, "The role of mayor is not an entry level position. The town now has a budget of \$70 million and 400 full and part time staff. The mayor is effectively a CEO and experience is essential."

It is certainly notable that two of the four mayoral candidates in the last election had no experience on council. Justin Altmann was one such candidate and commanded just shy of 30 per cent of the vote in 2010. Of course politicians, rather like lawyers and tax collectors, are a professional group that many people love to hate. As a result, Mr. Altmann's lack of experience may have actually been an attractive quality for some voters and that may be so if he were to decide to run again.

His campaign was creative and he appears to have an impressive entrepreneurial background, but for me the lack of experience is a killer. Mayor Wayne Emmerson has a well-developed skill for public speaking, which is an essential attribute for his position. Mr. Altmann was not able to best show his skills in this area at the 2010 mayoral debates and existing members of council, given their experience, would have the edge on this.

On a related theme, Mr. Bannon prides himself on

Talk Of The Town



having kept his ward members well informed during his time as councillor and he hopes to be able to continue this approach as mayor. He has made use of a website, social media and a printed newsletter in communicating with residents, as well as holding "town halls" where his ward members are given a chance to air their views.

Mr. Bannon suggested that this approach explains the documented high voter turnout in his ward. I think this could also be explained to a fair degree by demographics, but there is no doubt he has made a big effort to update the voters he represents on council developments, probably more so than any other current member of council. Another notable aspect of his tenure has been his providing the impetus for a number of successful community events such as the well-attended Winter Carnival on Musselman's Lake.

As you would expect of a former conservative MPP candidate, producing a balanced budget will be a key objective for Mr. Bannon. Whilst improving local services is important to him, this must go hand in hand with spending tax dollars wisely.

In the past Mr. Bannon has been one of a group of a councillors who have taken issue with some of council's spending decisions. I asked him in particular about the Weldon Road fire hall decision. My concern was not to rake over the coals of the past but to highlight where his approach may differ from some other members of council. He told me that the initial budget for the fire hall was around \$2.4 million but the eventual cost following various budget revisions was around \$7 million.

"To me any cost overruns are unacceptable," he said.

Mr. Bannon will certainly be a strong candidate for mayor; it will be interesting to see who else emerges to run against him in the coming months. At the time of writing, no other candidates for mayor have registered with the Town Clerk but that could change soon if rumours are to be believed.

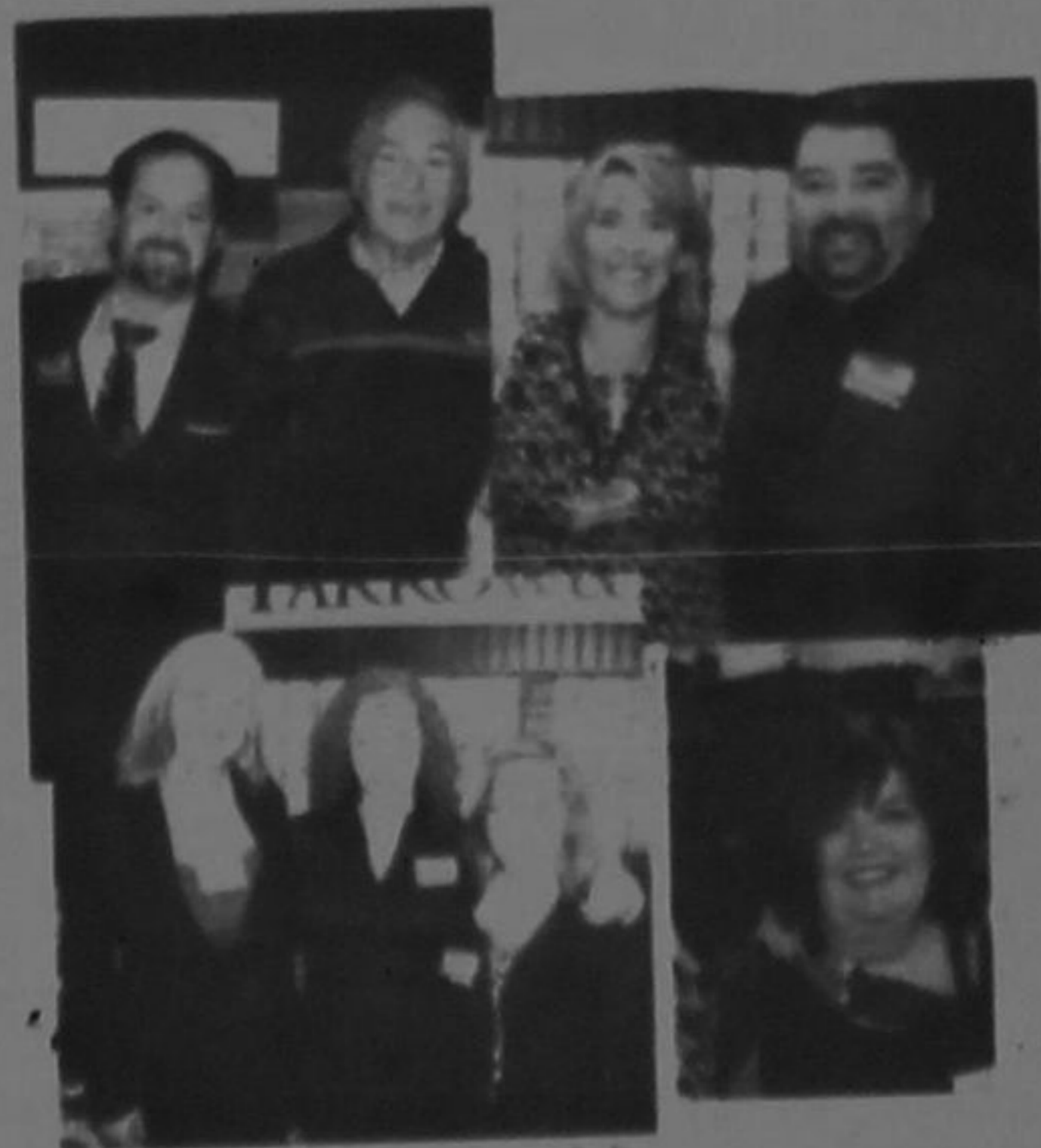
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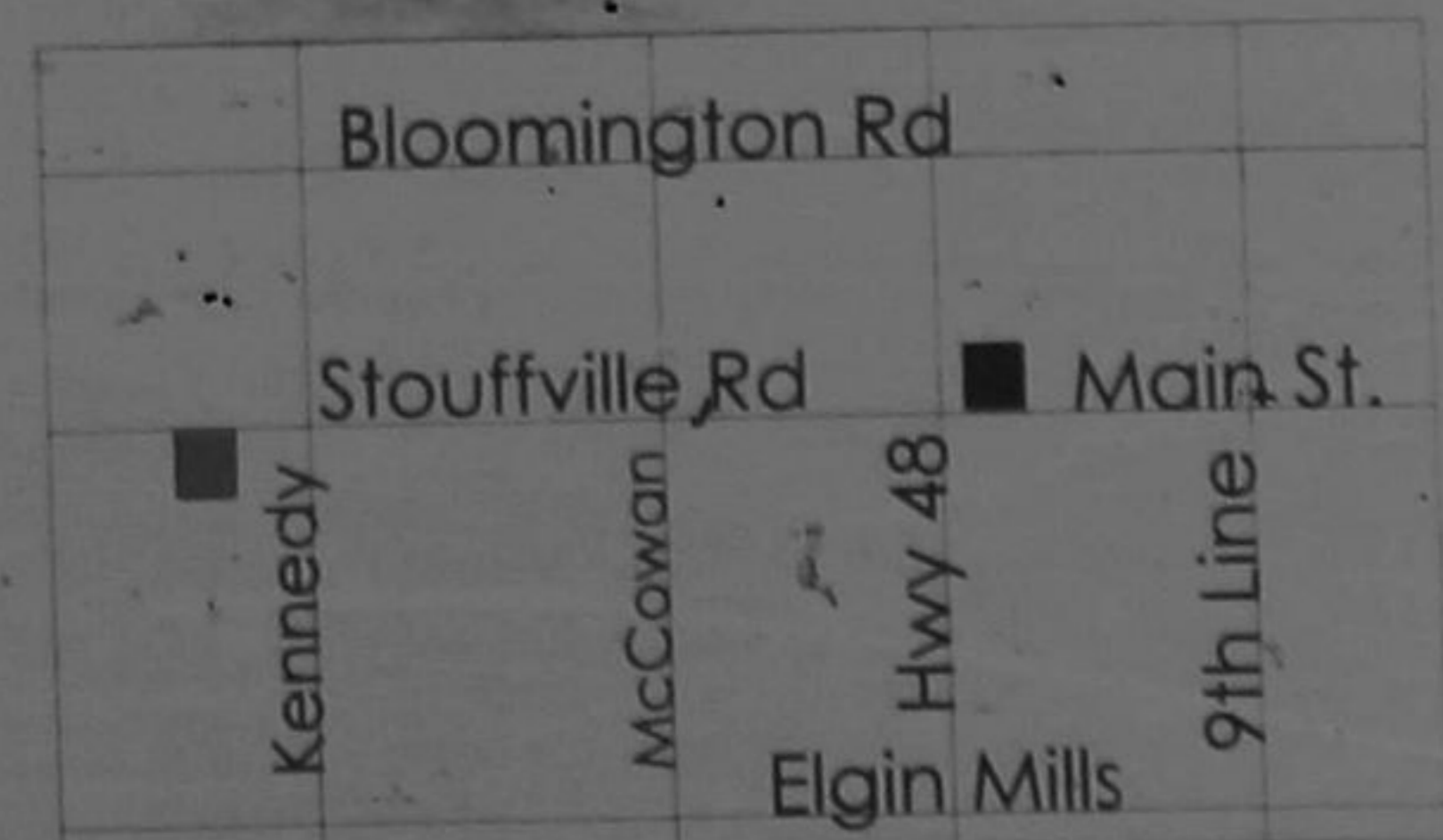
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