

Talk Of The Town



What's In A Name?

A club for all seniors

By Ben Embiricos

Changes in an organization's name can be very significant, reflecting a change in how it sees itself and wants to be seen by others. "Rebranding" is no longer a preserve of the corporate world, but has crept over into other areas of our lives.

This brings me to the 55 Plus Club.

Until quite recently, the club was known as the "Whitchurch-Stouffville Seniors' Club" or more fully as the "Whitchurch-Stouffville Silver Jubilee Senior Citizens' Club".

An excerpt from a 1999 commemorative booklet on the club's history notes that, "The club was inaugurated on February 7, 1977, when four ladies, concerned that Stouffville offered no recreation for the elderly, decided to speak up about using the old post office on Main Street for this purpose". Note the unapologetic use of the word "elderly".

I have heard different explanations about how the club came to change its name to the 55 Plus Club. One credible account suggests that there was a group within the club that considered it important to attract younger members.

There is an irony, isn't there, in a group founded to serve the 'elderly' subsequently seeking younger members? Isn't that a bit like the organizers of a play group becoming concerned that the age zero to five-year-old demographic is too dominant and that really what is needed are some toys to entertain the 20 to 30-year-olds?

This would not matter but for the fact that it is illustrative of a series of important problems. What, if anything, does a 55-year-old have in common

with a 96-year-old? In fact the former could be the grandchild of the latter!

There are some seniors of all ages who, not unreasonably, resent being defined by their age. It is also not uncommon to find people well into their eighties being healthy and active enough to enjoy a wide variety of activities, and no doubt they would like the club and the town to provide some of them. We can all respect this, with the important caveat that those who need significant help as a result of their age should be the priority.

In recent years, a number of older and/or more infirm seniors have expressed serious concerns that their needs are not being adequately met by the town or the club. Being a bit bored if you are a healthy, retired 65-year-old is a bit different from being an 88-year-old widow with a bad hip and an increasingly shrinking social life.

The name change to the 55 Plus Club underlines the risk of forgetting that the club was founded to help the "elderly".

In recent years the club has been housed in a temporary home at Latcham Hall, and the town renovated the building before the club moved in. Unfortunately the floor plan is such that only one program or activity can be provided at a time in most situations. So, for example, a seniors' yoga or dance class will mean that space is not available for cards and coffee. And many of the older and/or more infirm seniors cannot participate in yoga, dance or even chair yoga.

Different views about town facilities for seniors have circulated on council, within the club and elsewhere for years, with some favouring a new facility in the current town building and others

seeking a dedicated seniors' unit within the planned, but now seemingly on hold, library-leisure centre expansion. The perfect solution may take time; big, publicly-funded building projects do. But in the meantime, older seniors should be given a dedicated space they can use as a simple drop-in facility for a coffee and a chat for at least a few hours every week day.

The town and the club should remember that the priority should be to help seniors who need it by virtue of their age. That is why the club was formed and that is where the most pressing need remains. Telling a 90-year-old to wait a few years for something as basic as a dedicated place to go for a coffee is not reasonable.

Other towns provide this and so should we.

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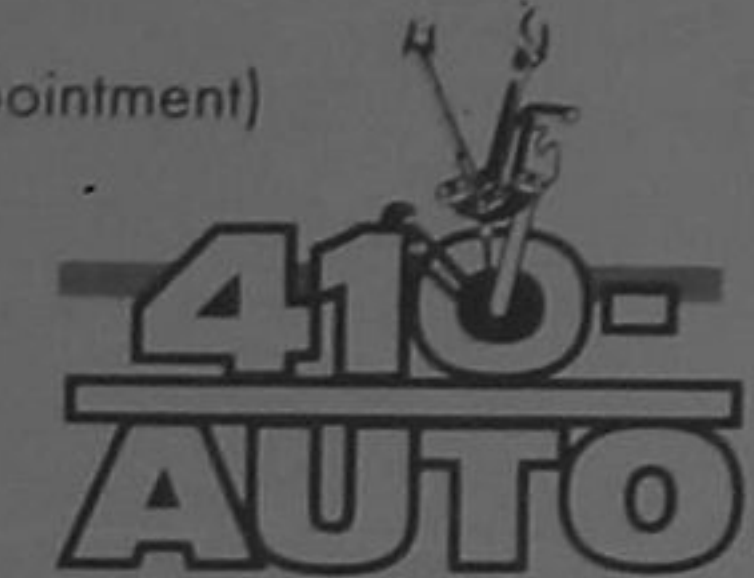
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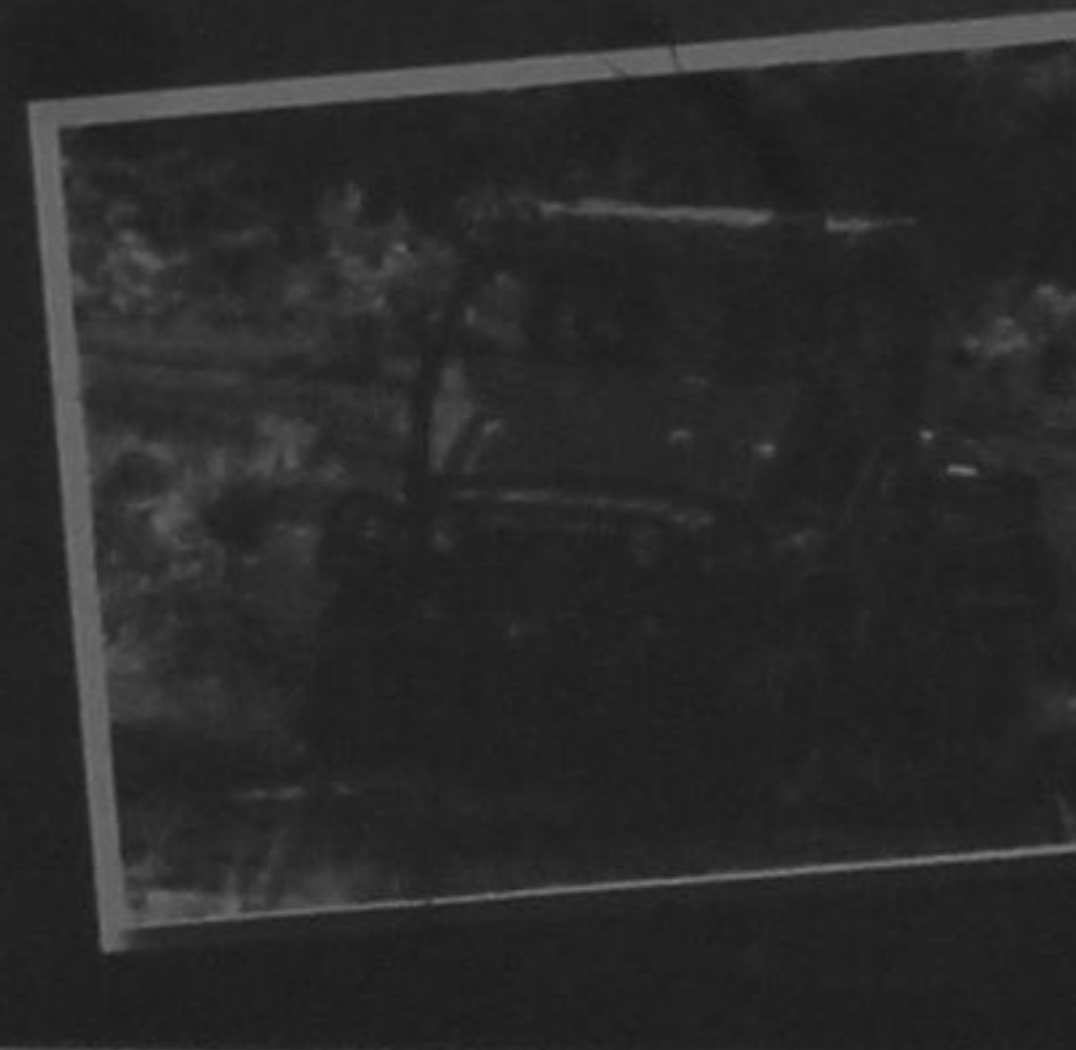


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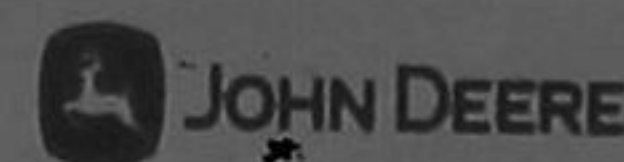
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