

Food Town Ontario?

By Bruce Stapley
Stouffville Free Press

The quandary as to what it would take to attract more people to Stouffville's downtown shopping area has perplexed local business types, politicians and residents for decades.

It's a question that has been pondered in good economic times and bad, in times of zero population growth and runaway development, from Christmas shopping season to Christmas shopping season.

Last fall's municipal election saw mayoral and council candidates tripping over each other in their efforts to convince voters that the health of the downtown shopping district was a top priority. It turns out that eventual Ward 5 council seat winner Iain Lovatt was on the right track with a suggestion that, while not exactly embraced at the time, turned out to be the winning ticket. Bring in food trucks, he said. Create a big event every now and then that will see people come to the downtown area to satisfy their calorific cravings.

But it was his claim that such a food truck frenzy would put money in the tills of the downtown merchants that seemed a little thin on reason. Wouldn't the downtown restaurateurs rail against such unwanted competition?

We all know how that one turned out after upwards of 8,000 people flocked to the

downtown back in June to wait in line for an eternity, enduring a wicked downpour as they eventually feasted on the fare produced by 16 food trucks at the first ever Food Truck Frenzy. A month later at the sequel there was a doubling of both the crowd and the number of food trucks on hand. It should be mentioned that today's food trucks are a far cry from the 'hot dog and fries' operations of years gone by. These gourmet wagons on wheels offer 'must try' dishes such as fish tacos and lobster rolls, not to mention a variety of poutine and hamburgers that the typical fast food outlet would never dare attempt.

Downtown restaurants benefited from the spill over effect as many people simply weren't willing to wait in line for an hour for their food fix. If you have thousands of people in one area around meal time, anyone offering to help satisfy the collective hunger is going to find their stoves and fryers working at or near full capacity. Even the Farmers' Market vendors benefited as the usually modest turnout of Thursday afternoon and early evening patrons ballooned as a result of the draw of the food trucks.

And the merchants? If you can't reap a bonanza in extra sales with a crowd that size walking past your store you shouldn't be in business.

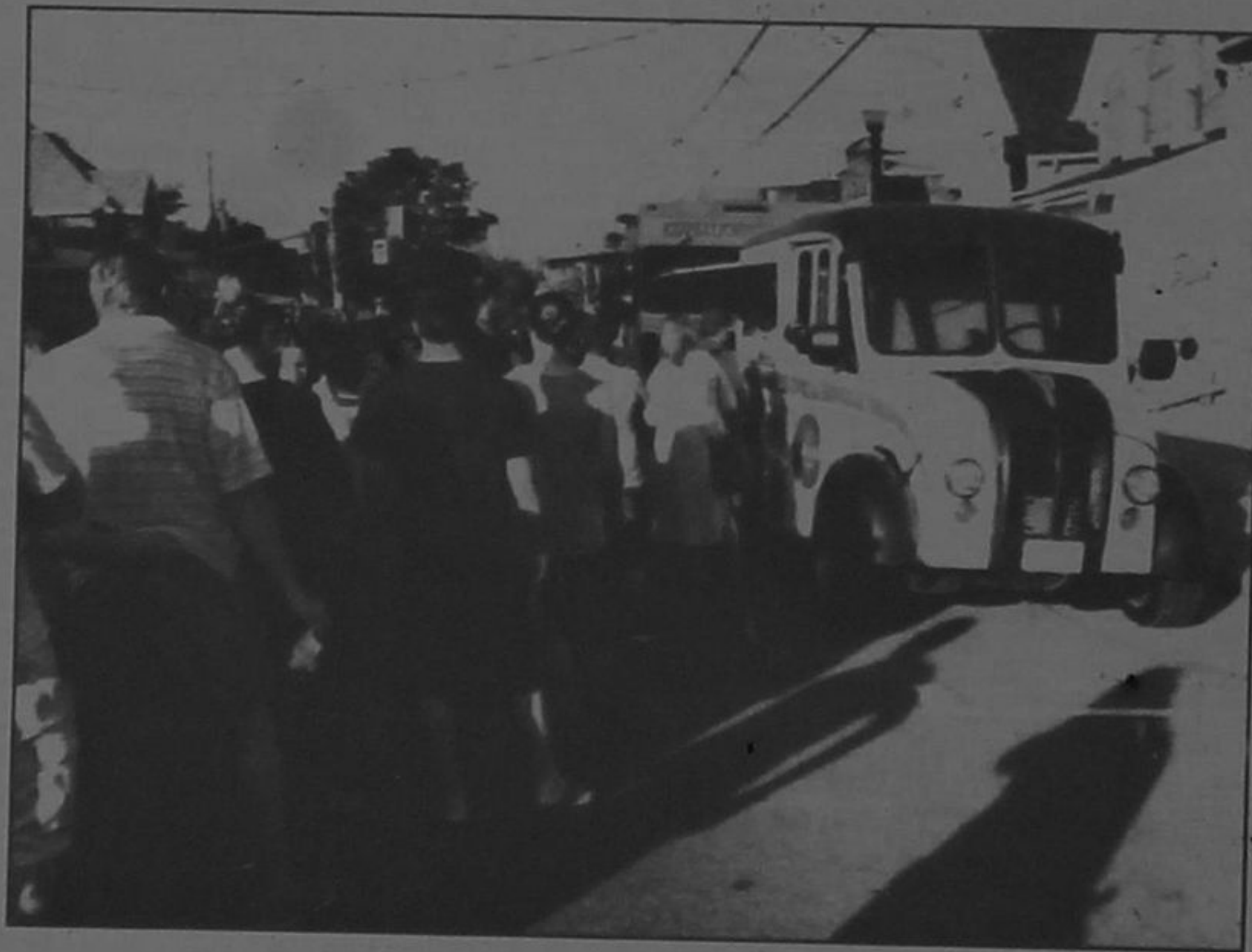
What it comes down to is

that even without the food trucks, Stouffville has become a desirable destination for residents and visitors looking for a variety of attractive dining options to choose from. It wasn't always thus. When I moved here in 1977 the choices for eating out were limited to a handful of dark, dingy joints with uninspiring menus and cooks who didn't know the difference between medium rare prime rib and a well worn shoe. That's all changed as it would take weeks for a discerning diner to experience the myriad gastronomic offerings now available in Town.

Anyone looking to open a new business here needs look no further than the steady flow of patrons into restaurants like the Fickle Pickle, King's Landing or Maki Zushi, cafés like Red Bulb, or fast food outlets such as McDonalds and Tim Hortons. Stouffville's new Symposium Café boasted the best opening day sales totals of any of the 22 such franchise in the province when they opened their doors here last month.

With apologies to my dear friend Jim Thomas, who pushed so hard a few years back to have Stouffville officially acknowledged for its musical prowess, it could just be that the time has come to consider a more apt designation. Hmm.... How does 'Food Town Ontario' sound to you?

The first Food Truck Frenzy held June 18 on Main St. drew upwards of 10,000 people and 16 food trucks. Roughly 47,000 people crowded into the Downtown area for the second Frenzy July 16, which saw double the number of trucks. Carole Nelles Photo



Charlie was very keen to attend the Moonlight Madness event again this year, and Hazel suddenly remembered why...



Free Opinion

Overzealous Police Presence Not Needed Here

There are more and more examples of police excesses surfacing in recent years, not just across the United States but here in Canada. In recent months the city of Toronto has been wrestling with the business of carding and the alleged tendency of that city's police to stop and question innocent people based upon racial stereotypes. While we are fortunate in that we rarely hear of incidents involving police heavy-handedness here in Stouffville, occasional examples of inappropriate police behaviour do surface on occasion.

The recent Pan Am Games Torch Relay celebration in Memorial Park saw organizers cordon off a small area for media photographers directly in front of the stage upon which the festivities were occurring. Two police officers were assigned to the general area, presumably to keep the large crowd from encroaching upon the pathways provided for the various acts to access the stage. When the photographer from this publication edged ever so slightly across the line that defined the media area in order to get the perfect shot, one officer quickly proceeded to threaten him in a gruff manner with expulsion from the media spot if he didn't retreat immediately. Rather than diplomatically letting the photographer know that this was where the next act was to walk past and to be watchful when they did come by, he let fire with the type of uncompromising vitriol that power

trippers in uniforms sometimes do. Which left a very bad taste in the mouth of the photographer, who has been covering events in Stouffville without incurring the wrath of the men in blue for the better part of three decades. Later in the proceedings the same dunderheaded officer blocked access to the stage of a youngster who was part of a skit by the Motus O' dance troupe, thinking perhaps that the fresh faced, soccer shirt-clad kid was bent on sabotage. Come on people, this isn't the Middle East!

It didn't help that the same photographer was privy to an incident earlier in the year which saw an overzealous York Region Police officer fling a temporarily disoriented teenager up against his cruiser, and cuff him like a common criminal despite the fact the young man was simply in need of a little TLC and had given the officer no reason at all to behave in such an aggressive manner.

Sure, these incidents don't compare with tasering a man to death in a streetcar or in an airport. But the damage done to the reputation of police officers everywhere cannot be easily erased when such over the top behaviour is exhibited.

So while Stouffville's police presence is reasonably innocuous overall, just a heads up to officers everywhere that their uniforms are a symbol of assistance and protection, not an excuse to power trip and use officious means without just cause.

UP AND COMING

The Stouffville Free Press welcomes community event listings from non-profit groups and organizations. Please send a brief synopsis of upcoming events by email to stouffvillefreepress@rogers.com

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| Bruce Stapley | Ruth LeBlanc |
| Kinjal Dagli-Shah | Rob Reid |
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Mailing Address: 5758 Main St., Stouffville, Ontario L4A 2T1
 Phone: 905-640-FREE (3733)
 Editor: Bruce Stapley / stouffvillefreepress@bell.net
 Advertising Sales: Edward Nelles / edward@thenellesgroup.com / 416-898-3887
 Jann Smit / jann.smit@cogeco.ca
 Graphics Department: Travis Merrick, Sheri Smith & Nicole Love / travis.merrick@sympatico.ca