



Reflecting on the past, looking to the future

By Ben Embiricos

Mayor Wayne Emmerson will depart his current job in the coming weeks, as a new mayor and council begin to get accustomed to their new jobs. But the political veteran will hope it is the shortest of goodbyes.

First elected as a councillor in 1985, Mr Emmerson went on to serve 17 years as mayor. In 2010 though, he made clear that he would not seek re-election in 2014 but would instead seek to become chair of York Region council. He will hope to get the nod for that job on Dec. 11 when the newly-formed regional council has its first meeting. I met recently with Mayor Emmerson to talk about his record in Stouffville and to look ahead to what he hopes will become his next challenge at the region.

Mr Emmerson was Stouffville born and raised and has seen the town change a lot. Given his long time involvement on council he has helped shape much of that change, perhaps more so than any other individual of the last two decades or so. During the last 29 years residents have come to him with any variety of concerns from when Tim Hortons was going to come to town (1993, it turns out), to the cost of amateur hockey, the location of the library, funding of the arts and just about everything in between.

But the persistent questions and the endless details of the job don't seem to have bothered him. "It's been a great job, every day is a different day," he said. "Has everything we have done been right? No. But to be fair to all councils, we do the best we possibly can and we try to provide the best services for the majority of residents. But not everyone will agree."

Shopping for groceries in town can take him a long time as he will sometimes have to field plenty of questions from residents in the process, but that, he said, is fine with him.

Looking back over his career on council we talked about what for him were some of the highlights. He said there were many, including the new fire halls in Ballantrae and Stouffville, the new ice pads, the skateboard park and SoccerCity. He also cited the

improved infrastructure and the growth. "Kids who have gone away to university...are coming back to raise a family here and grandparents are moving here to be closer to their families," pointed out. "We've got good schools and all the facilities."

Inevitably, in his long career on council there have been some things that have not turned out as well as he would have liked. This, he said, was certainly true of the toboggan hill in Memorial Park which was removed in the course of the park redesign. That loss left a bitter taste with many residents. Mr Emmerson told me that the need to create a north-south link to Main Street and the opposition of residents to opening up existing residential streets meant that the new road was necessary, and regrettably the hill had to go.

Looking ahead at the opportunity to become York Region chair, Mr. Emmerson told me "it's a different job...it's in the bigger scheme of things."

Our town is, of course, just a small chunk of the region which in recent decades has ballooned to a population of over 1.2 million. Having seventeen years experience as a mayor, however, means that Mr. Emmerson must have a good shot at the job. There is a precedent - the late Eldred King went from being mayor of Whitchurch-Stouffville to chair of York Region, and Mayor Emmerson hopes to follow suit.

"We've got some issues at the region, we've got big debt, we've got transit issues," he acknowledged. "There are big dollars going to the region and a lot of people being employed by them. People say to me, 'You've got some work to do'; I say yes, but I've also got 20 [regional council] members sitting with me to help make the region better".

Mr. Emmerson will be hoping to exit the stage as mayor before a quick costume change into new garb as chair of York Region.

As one chapter ends perhaps a new one will begin.



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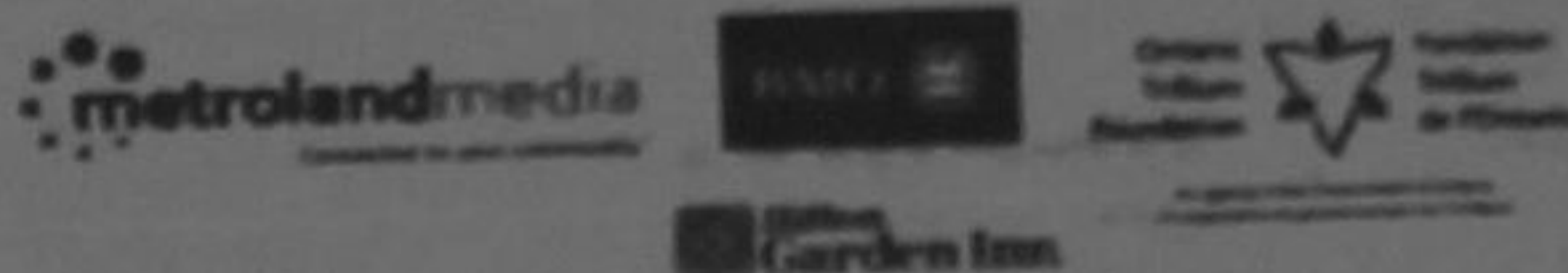
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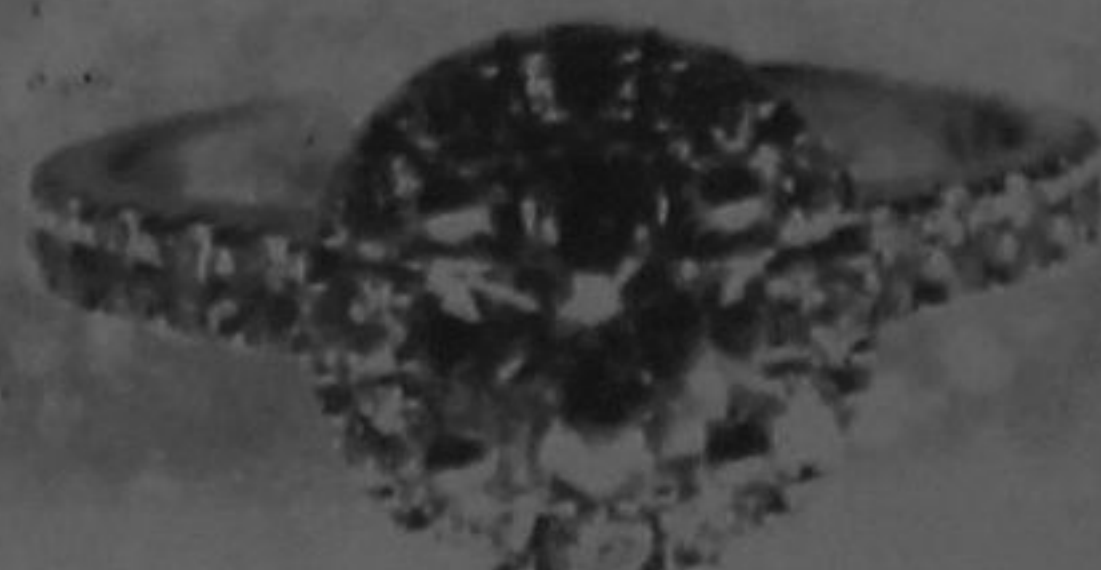
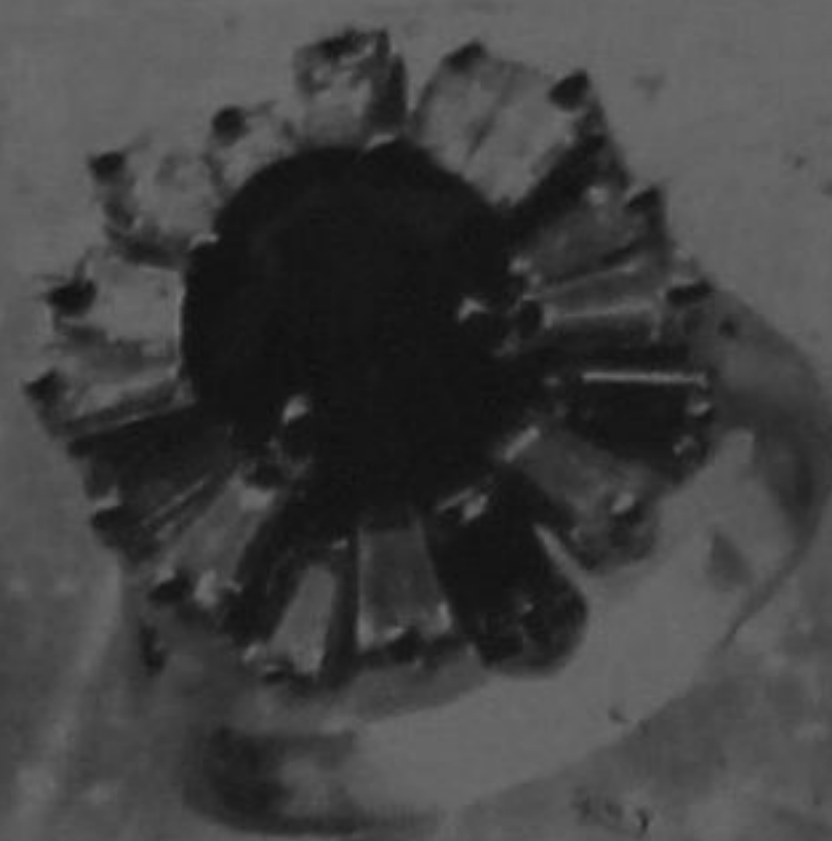
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