

By Jill McWhinnie

Bears to settle in Stouffville

Although earlier reports had indicated that the black bear spotted in town at Main Street and Ninth Line was just "passing through", Whitchurch-Stouffville This Month has learned that the bear, Ursa, his mate Ursi and their two cubs have decided to make Stouffville their permanent home. When spotted at the busy west end intersection on June 2, the bear was actually on his way to the Mattamy Sales Office on Ninth Line South to buy a house. Earlier that morning he had been checking out potential lots in the Madori development north of Elm Road.

The Ursis are moving to Stouffville from northern York Region, where rapidly expanding development is consuming their habitat. They are being re-settled here under the Ministry of Natural Resources' Bear Urbanization Relocation Program (BURP), which provides a one time grant to each bear family to purchase a home in an urban setting. The Ministry expects hundreds of bears to take advantage of the program, since once the Region is fully built out, they will have nowhere else to live.

So, what can residents having a family of bears living next door expect? "We think the bears will make very good neighbours," says Jess Parker of the MNR's South Central Office. "Relatively few people are eaten by bears. And since the bears will be hibernating for five months of the year, they will be much quieter than human neighbours."

We asked Ursi why he chose Stouffville. He smiled. "MacDonalds,

Harvey's, Swiss Chalet. Up north we only get that food after it's thrown out. Humans think bears like eating their half rotten left-overs. That's nonsense. Do you feed your children garbage?"

The Ursis were also attracted to the natural recreational opportunities in the area — especially Bruce's Mill. "The cubs love picnics," says Ursi.

The MNR is optimistic that the species integration of bears and humans will be a win-win situation. "Humans can learn a lot from bears,"

says Parker. "In laboratory settings assessing certain types of intelligence bears have actually scored higher than humans!"

Parker is confident that the bears will adapt easily to life in an urban setting and will quickly achieve financial independence. "Bears are natural entrepreneurs, which is a good fit for a small town hoping to revive local business."

Ursi and Ursa are looking forward to establishing a number of businesses on

Stouffville's Main Street, in which they will employ other bears as they relocate into Stouffville. Ursa will operate Bearskin, an aesthetics parlour offering a wide range of skin care services, and also plans to establish Bear Necessities, a quaint lifestyle shop which will sell bear-themed crafts and collectibles. Ursi is looking for Main Street space to house an upscale tobacconist — Smokey the Bear — and will also open

a licensed steakhouse — Hungry as a Bear — in the former Latham Gallery location.

Encouraged by his glowing reports about our fair town, several bears of Ursi's acquaintance will soon be moving to Stouffville. He says they are looking forward to making human friends and participating in community events, especially the Strawberry Festival. We urge you all to make them welcome!

Ursa and Ursi hope their employment plans bear fruit.



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