

Maryann Relf and Shadow join Lisa Gallagher-White and Grace as they prepare to take part in the first ever Stouffville Lions Club walkathon to raise funds for the Lions Foundation of Canada Walk for Dog Guides. All the money raised at the Oct. 11 event was donated directly to training dogs for people with disabilities.

Cultural exchange an education for both Korean and Canadian teachers

By Kate Gilderdale
Stouffville This Month

A group of 16 South Korean educators arrived in York Region at the end of September to spend three weeks touring schools, learning about various aspects of our education system and doing some sight-seeing.

Among the volunteers who provided accommodation for the visitors were Orchard Park Public School teacher Miriam O'Rourke, Stouffville District Secondary School librarian Judy McKnight and former Summitview principal Heather Nielsen, who is a special education coordinator at the York Region District School Board. In October, four of the guests attended a pot luck dinner with their hosts at Mrs. O'Rourke's home in Stouffville.

During the evening they discussed the differences and similarities between the Canadian and Korean

systems of education. Gyu-Hwa Kim, who is vice-principal at a secondary school in Suncheon, said they were particularly impressed with the York Board's integrated programs for handicapped and disabled students and with the breakfast program provided for students in some areas.

"In Korea we gather all the students with disabilities in one school," he said, adding that plans for an integrated school were currently being considered. The secondary system is divided into academic and vocational schools, with students entering the three-year program at the age of 16. At the academic high school where Mr. Kim works, his day usually begins at 8 a.m. and finishes around 10 at night. "In Korea to enter university is very competitive, and students have to study hard."

While regular classes end at 5 p.m., the students have supper in

the school cafeteria before starting a supervised study period, similar to homework. Students also attend classes on Saturday mornings. In the elementary schools, the day is similar to ours, with classes starting around 9 a.m. and ending at 3:30 or 4 p.m. "Korea is different from Canada," said Mr. Kim. "Students go to elementary school until sixth grade and for three years to a middle school."

Attendance at high school is optional, and at that level, all students must pay fees, whereas elementary and middle school education is free. Throughout the Korean system "there are 35 students on average in each class," said In-Sik Park, who is a school inspector.

The visitors also enjoyed meeting students involved in an initiative called STINT (short term interaction on neutral territory). The program is designed to help students in grades 6 to 8 with

behavioural problems. During the Korean group's visit, the students were polite and enthusiastic, and were eager to learn Korean phrases. "We were very impressed," said Jik-Seung Young, who teaches English in grade 8.

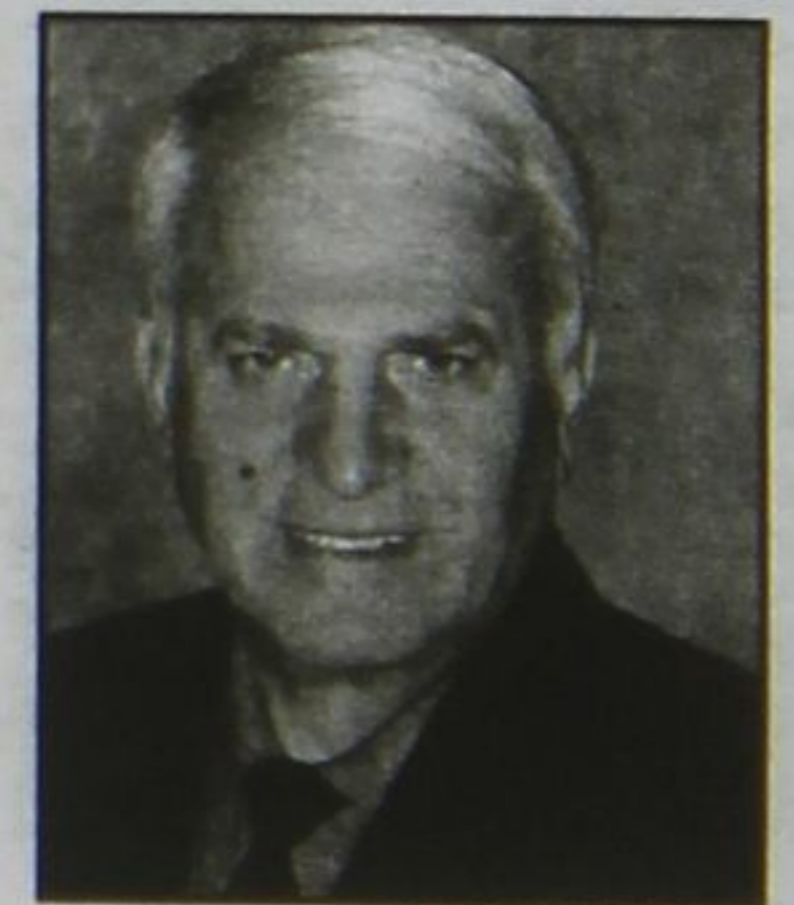
Overall, said Mr. Kim, Korean students are more respectful of both teachers and parents. "In Korea, when the teacher walks past the students, the students always greet the teacher." And despite their long days in the classroom, teachers often socialize after work, he said.

"In Korea we enjoy the night life. During the week we meet a friend, a relative and fellow teachers and have dinner and drinks. Usually the meeting ends at 11 or midnight, but on the weekend we usually spend our time with family."

Although only about five percent of teachers in Korea are female, the visiting group consisted of 10 women and six men.

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