

OPINION

Living

WOODBRIDGE

A monthly supplement of York Region Newspaper Group
A division of Metroland Printing, Publishing and Distributing
9 Heritage Rd., Markham L3P 1M3
Phone: 1-866-846-1889
e-mail: lbeihl@ymg.com

PUBLISHER *Ian Proudfoot*

ADVERTISING MANAGER
Steve Kane

DISTRIBUTION MANAGER
Barry Black

MANAGING EDITOR
Leigh Beihl

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Pam Burgess

EDITOR
Tina Rogers

GRAPHIC ARTIST
Jerusha Johnson

My view



Tina Rogers

Fluffy tales

You have to admire squirrels. Love them or hate them, they are survivors and are here to stay in our urban backyards. A friend describes them as rats with tails. I once saw a neighbour with a squirrel on a leash — I am not making this up. I wouldn't go that far myself, but they are cute — for vermin.

Last week I started to feed the little blighters. I protest. I have not gone mad, not as far as the squirrels are concerned at least. But I look at it this way: they are going to be a nuisance whatever I do, so at least I can find a way to minimize the disruption that they cause.

Before I moved to Vaughan I became quite the squirrel expert, a family of red squirrels having chewed their way through the woodwork of my century home to take up residence in a cosy little nook above the family room. It was evident that these handsome, fluffy creatures had a vicious determination to survive and raise a family in comfort. After consultation over a period of months with Troy, my humane pest control person, we blocked the holes ... all except the one really tiny one we'd missed. Do you know how small a hole a red squirrel can get into? It's minute.

Once discovered, the hole was covered with all speed, but having cut off the only remaining exit point, we'd trapped a squirrel inside the house. A two-day interlude with a frantic trapped squirrel inside your house is no picnic, not forgetting his little gift I found in my laundry hamper. They move at lightning speed. Using peanut butter in outdoor traps I managed to catch him and two of his friends within a week, then took long drives into the countryside to take the little darlings back to nature.

This spring I installed six bird feeders in my backyard, complete with squirrel and raccoon baffles. However, we battled with a team of black squirrels for two weeks, as they jumped — nay, flew — from the flimsiest of twigs to grasp the distant feeder arms like an accomplished circus trapeze artist. No matter where we moved the feeders, their acrobatic prowess improved.

I recognise a losing battle, so I bought a squirrel feeder box (yes, they do exist), a bag of squirrel food, and installed it forthwith on a fence post. Squirrel food is a delicious-looking blend of nuts and seeds, and they are really lucky to be so amply catered for. Magic.

The squirrels love this newly accessible food supply. Now they mostly leave the bird feeders alone. The birds are happy, the squirrels were here to stay anyway so they're happy to have an extended menu, and I'm happy to be able to observe 20 or so varieties of our beautiful Ontario birds munching away in peace. Now if we could just stop the squirrels from pulling the front cover off the feeder in their great excitement, we'll truly be on to a winner.

Comments? Email Tina at woodbridgeliving@rogers.com



PHOTO BY TINA ROGERS

Around Town

Communities working together: industrious quilters Annie Hill, Fran Bones, Linda Olsen and Carol Sharer at Nobleton United Church put some finishing touches to a spectacular quilt in readiness for the grand raffle prize at Kleinburg's Bindertwine Festival which will be enjoyed by all of Vaughan, the rest of York Region and the GTA on September 10.

YOUR VIEW

Your challenge

Like you, others in your community want to know what's going on. Please email me about the goings-on, the special people and upcoming events in your area, and show your pride in your local community.

Who do you know in Woodbridge who is doing something out of the ordinary? Is there an event coming up that you are sure others would hate to miss, or a good cause that deserves community support?

What makes Woodbridge so great is the combination of fascinating people, the great amenities, the respect we have for all kinds of arts — music, performances, fine arts. And there are plenty of happenings. I do as much research as I can, but I hope I can rely on you to let me know what you know.

For example, do you know anyone who may be a good candidate for the call for artists by the McMichael gallery?

Email Tina at woodbridgeliving@rogers.com

EDITORIAL POLICY: Opinions expressed by columnists, contributors and letter writers are not necessarily those of Woodbridge Living. Letters must include a complete name, address and telephone number. Living reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space. **ADVERTISING POLICY:** The publisher is not liable for slight changes or typographical errors that do not lessen the value of an advertisement. The publisher is not liable for other errors or omissions in connection with any advertisement in any subsequent issue or the refund of any money paid for the advertisement. All claims of error in publication must be made within two weeks of publication and, if not made, will not be considered. No claim will be allowed for more than one insertion.

Iconoclast



Chris Caldwell

Public space

Where there was once plenty of public space used by friends, families and children to meet, commune and chat about anything under the sun, we have lost that to privatized copycat cafes. I grew up on the outskirts of Toronto. I remember, in the early '70s, walking regularly with my grandparents to the corner store and sitting in a parkette to enjoy a sandwich or a drink. It was an event.

These days that privilege costs some kind of usage fee — you have to buy something. You get an over-priced drink and a view of a parking lot through franchised windows.

Public spaces help define the character of a neighborhood. But now we meet in privatized space all the time, unaware that communications are constrained by the locale and potentially — as cameras are now being installed everywhere — under surveillance. The social aspects of meeting change as our public space diminishes. Soon everything will be owned and we will have to buy something, anything, just to meet somewhere.

Modern urban planning and design facilitates community social dynamics by ensuring there is enough public space. Libraries, parks, transit and sidewalks all qualify as public. How much is enough? Can there be too much? If everything is given over to the developers and franchisees, only sidewalks will remain in public domain. Even then we have to compete with skateboarders and in-line skaters while we avoid tripping on coffee cups, plastic drinking bottles and other trash carelessly discarded by those that do not value public spaces that remain.

Historically, public spaces have been generators of great change. Revolution, protests and decision-making have found their roots in public space gatherings. Some of the most memorable moments occur where the population stands together to fight for what they believe. Take Tiananmen Square in China: the time a lone man stood in front of a tank — a vision that inspired the world. What about Central Park in New York, the best thing that could happen in a city. Coffee houses in 17th century England that gave birth to *The Times* newspaper were one thing, but somehow I just don't see public dealings happening inside a franchise. Granted, they make a good Americano, but they are too chic for passionate radicalism to develop (or perhaps it's general apathy that prevents actionism).

Use it or lose it. Value your public spaces and use them for more than just relieving your dog. We can sustain these special places if we can get our cans off the comfy chairs at the franchise.

Chris quit corporate life to follow his passion for sustainable communities and urban planning, and is pursuing a masters degree in environmental studies at York University.

Living ON OUR COVER



PHOTO BY TINA ROGERS

Doris Pontieri puts finishing touches to one of her submissions for the 2006 McMichael art show and sale.