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GROWTH & PLANNING

Report unearths cemetery woes

Newmarket in urgent need of new land for burials

BY LISA QUEEN lqueen@yrmg.com

Back in 1867, the year of Confederation, when residents would take a horse and buggy to the outskirts of their small town to bury a loved one, it must have seemed like the 18 acres of the new Newmarket Cemetery would last forever.

But on this chilly spring day as a funeral procession arrives, cemetery board secretary Dave Evans wonders if there will be enough time to find land, get approvals in place and develop a new graveyard before the existing cemetery on Main Street North runs out of room.

The cemetery is 10 years or so away from not being able to service any more casket burials, although it will still be able to accept cremation interments, said Evans, a soft-spoken man with a quiet sense of humour.

"In terms of our planning, (it is a growing concern) because it

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takes 10 to 15 years to be able to buy a site and get all the approvals and open it...We're very close if we can't do something and get ourselves started," he said.

"We're infilling areas. By just leaving the ring road and taking out the smaller roads and taking out some old pathways where horse and buggies went through, if we maximize it, if we don't get a plague, (we can extend the life of the cemetery as much as possible). More people are going to cremation, so that makes it longer."

Newmarket tops the list of York Region municipalities in

See page A10.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

David Evans, third generation member of the board of directors at the Newmarket Cemetery is concerned because it is about 10 years away from not being able to service any more casket burials.

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HEALTH & WELLNESS

Being 'patient' at Southlake

Youths learn how to eat while suffering pain, injury

BY CHRIS SIMON csimon@yrmg.com

Sarah Abdel-Rahman is spending a day in the shoes of a Southlake Regional Health Centre patient.

The Sir William Mulock Secondary School Grade 11 student spent Tuesday working with hospital staff to design a youth advisory council.

For more information on CreateIT Now initiatives, go to: bit.ly/1ruROtE

As a 'patient with a back injury' she had to reach for her meal while being restrained around her stomach to a chair.

About 25 of her peers from Mulock and Huron Heights Secondary School participated in the student experiential learning initiative, which was organized in collaboration with

See page A9.

IN PHOTO: Huron Heights student Emmerson Blue, an 'arthritic patient' with very little hand movement takes on a challenge to feed himself with mitts at the Southlake Regional Health Centre CreateIT Now event to see what it's like for patients with limited vision, restricted physical movement or pain.



STAFF PHOTO/SUSIE KOCKERSCHIEDT

AMAZING PEOPLE

Champions of character honoured for giving back

BY LYREL ROBINSON

A princely wave from a 10-year-old hero, plus a group "selfie" of long-standing champions of character were poignant moments at the 10th annual York Region Character Community Awards in Richmond Hill last Friday.

Some 15 individuals, schools, groups and business leaders across York Region were in the spotlight at the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts for demonstrating exemplary character attributes such as compassion, perseverance, respect, honesty and optimism.

Two special honourees this year are the Donald Cousens Awards winner, Kathleen Redmond of East Gwillimbury, and the Community Hero winner, Maddox Blair-Hartwick, age 10, of Georgina.

Redmond is a past Character Community Foundation member and last year helped develop and deliver a series of workshops, Creating a Character Culture, to help organizations, businesses, cultural groups and charities grow healthy, effective workplaces.



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Myles, Quincey and Jan, children and husband of Merlene Samuel-Cephas, accept the Character Through the Arts Award on her behalf. Merlene, who died in November 2015, founded Newmarket's Arts Spotlight Theatre School and was influential in the York Region arts scene for many years.

For more information on Character Community initiatives, go to: bit.ly/24xWqO3

An author and corporate trainer, she founded the Centre for Character Leadership in 1993. She has worked with York municipalities, and national and international companies, and volunteers as a director with Routes of Georgina.

Maddox earned the hero award for exhibiting calmness and quick thinking in a time of medical emergency. He and his mother were dog-sitting for a friend in a home in Keswick. His mother, Melissa, lost consciousness and collapsed. Maddox

See page A9.

COMMUNITY

You helped raise funds for local charity runs

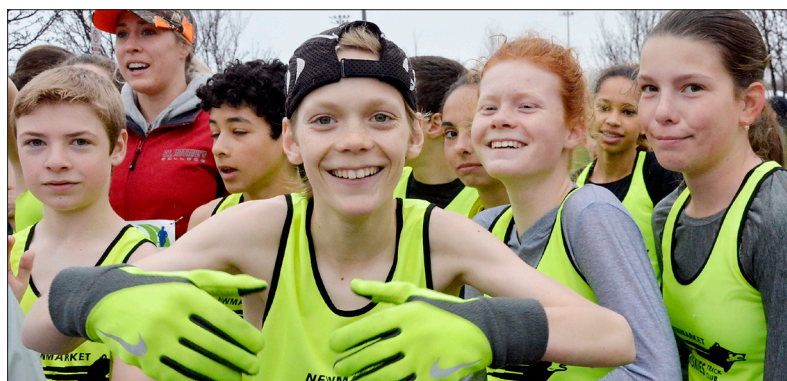
BY CHRIS SIMON csimon@yrmg.com

Charity run season is in full swing. From multiple sclerosis awareness to hikes for hospices, it seems every non-profit organization in northern York Region hosts a fundraising run or walk once spring

breaks into full bloom. This past weekend was no different.

Even Sunday's wet weather couldn't dampen the spirits of thousands of residents, many of whom donned ponchos or car-

See page A8.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

The annual Run or Walk for Southlake was held Sunday at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Centre in Aurora. J.T. Boston and fellow members of the Huskies running club await their turn at the start line.

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# York Region first area to 'recognize' the problem, industry says

From Front Page

urgent need of new cemetery land, according to study by consultant LEES + Associates Architects and Planners.

The need will also soon reach a critical stage in Georgina, East Gwillimbury, Aurora and Richmond Hill, according to the report, which some in the cemetery industry are praising as the first comprehensive municipal cemetery needs analysis in Canada.

"In my mind, York Region is the first region to even recognize the problem and to reach out to the industry to understand the problem, so my hat's off to York Region for doing this," said Glen Timney, vice-president of corporate development for the Mount Pleasant Group, which owns a number of funeral homes, cemeteries and mausoleums, including Elgin Mills Cemetery in Richmond Hill.

In addition to a lack of cemetery land in certain areas of the region, there is also an impending need to provide more dedicated graveyard space for some religious and cultural groups, most notably Roman Catholics.

Also, the industry is growing increasingly worried about the fact Toronto is running out of cemetery land and more of the city's residents are looking to surrounding communities to bury their dead.

"In isolation, some areas of York Region have sufficient land. Other areas of York Region will be running out of cemetery land.

"But the major issue is the city

of Toronto will be out of cemetery space in 20 to 30 years and there is no more land available in the city of Toronto for cemetery space," Timney said.

"So, the regions around Toronto, and Mississauga will be in the same situation and we have to be prepared to have sufficient cemetery space to accommodate Toronto and Mississauga. That's the major issue. That bridge has never been crossed anywhere in Canada before. These are the first major centres in Canada that, all of a sudden, we're running out."

Evans has long family ties to the Newmarket Cemetery, a non-profit, non-denominational graveyard.

His grandfather, Arthur, was once president of the volunteer board, as was Evans' father, Harold.

His son, Matt, is carrying on the family tradition as a director on the board.

Many of Evans' family members are buried at the cemetery, including his nine-year-old son, Christopher, who died of leukemia, his stillborn daughter, Elizabeth, and his uncle, Stephen, who died fighting in the First World War.

Our society doesn't like to think about death and the need for cemeteries, Evans said.

"It's a cultural thing that has been foisted on us. Because of Hollywood, youth, we'll live forever,

we're all beautiful people. That sense that we don't necessarily venerate the elderly like other cultures do," Evans said.

Avoiding dealing with needs of the dead is often no different for government leaders, he believes.

Municipal planners and politicians appear more likely to address the housing, recreational and employment needs of growing communities than requirements for cemetery plots.

Besides, cemeteries don't pay annual property taxes or development charges when they build new graveyards, meaning municipalities aren't exactly rushing to welcome them, Evans said.

The average homeowner in York pays \$2,223.19 in regional property taxes and that doesn't include their local municipal or school board property taxes.

Regional development charges on a single-family home are \$41,920, while on a multiple-unit dwelling, such as a townhouse, they are \$36,673.

"They (municipalities) don't want us because we represent no taxes. It's something they don't want to think about, but this document tells them they do (need to) and they need to remove obstacles," Evans said.

Anticipating the future need

for cemetery land in the 1950s, the Newmarket cemetery board bought 37 acres on Leslie Street, north of Mulock Drive.

But after realizing in 2010 that the site would not provide enough land for the next 100 years — cemeteries tend to plan for 50 to 100-year time frames — the cemetery sold all but 10 acres to developer Forest Green Homes.

The cemetery wanted to use the 10-acre wooded area for a "green burial site" while it looked for a larger plot of land for a new cemetery outside of town in East Gwillimbury, northern King or Whitchurch-Stouffville.

The town dismissed the green burial site idea, although Evans said the cemetery board would like to revisit the plan.

Overall, there are sufficient cemetery lands in the region to accommodate the 232,000 York residents who are expected to die between now and 2041, even as the region's senior population increases by 148 per cent during that time.

But lack of graveyard space in Toronto will put significant pressure on York, the report said. Toronto residents already account for 33 per cent of cemetery sales in the region. That could skyrocket to as much as 66 per cent as Toronto and other communities run out of cemetery space.

"York Region will not have enough cemetery land capacity for 25 years of resident demand and non-resident use if the proportion of non-resident use increases to 66 per cent in the future," the report said.

Although Queensville Cemetery

general manager Jeff McIntosh has enough land to service the community for decades to come, he said the region was prudent in studying the cemetery requirements in communities across York.

The cemetery has 15 acres of land left.

Last year, it used 1/10th of an acre.

"A hundred years from now, we'll still have space, particularly with (more people turning to) cremation," he said.

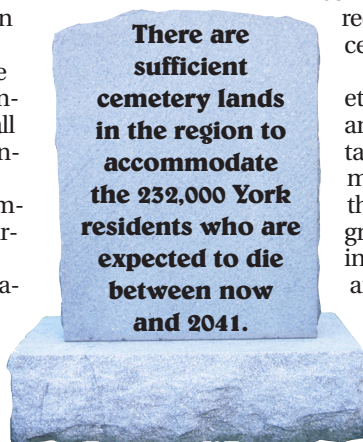
"We'll be servicing the Queensville area for many years to come."

The region has heard the concerns of the cemetery industry and is working to come up with policies to address them, Sandra Malcic, the region's manager of planning and environment in long-range planning, said.

At the same time, jurisdiction on some issues, such as the ability to accommodate the industry's longer planning horizons and allowing new cemetery space on low-quality agricultural lands, would rest with the province, although the region may make recommendations to Queen's Park in those directions, she said.

"We're going to have a lot of consultation with the industry and the province because they're really key in the discussions. But the hope is that we can develop a pretty proactive policy," she said.

"We don't figure it will be perfect, but we're hoping it will go a long way to showing the industry that we're committed to meeting the need and hoping we can work together to get a policy framework that will allow us to do so."



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CEMETERY CHALLENGE — A SERIES

## Grave digger predicts big industry change

'There will be no 1-acre, 2-acre cemeteries anymore. It's a thing of the past'

BY LISA QUEEN  
lqueen@yrmg.com

**W**hen Don Reesor took over the family grave digging business from his uncle in 1985, he was still using just a shovel and wheelbarrow to dig plots.

He would shovel out half a grave early in the morning before heading to his job as a probation officer.

After his day job, his wife would help him finish off the grave before the couple and their two young children would eat a picnic dinner on the grounds of one of the many small cemeteries where he worked.

Reesor, who owns DRX Excavating and Lawn Care in Whitchurch-Stouffville, has seen many changes that have affected the cemetery industry in York Region over the past three decades.

Small community graveyards containing a few hundred souls have given way to major cemetery and funeral companies.

The population has roughly tripled as subdivisions have gobbled up valuable land, but while urban planners and politicians have made room for houses, schools, hospitals, libraries, fire halls and recreation centres, the idea of setting aside land for cemeteries has often been ignored, possibly because graveyards don't pay property taxes and development fees.

Aging baby boomers are causing the region's seniors population to skyrocket. They will make up the bulk of the 232,000 residents who will die over the next quarter century.

With Canada welcoming about 250,000 newcomers a year, with most immigrants settling in major urban areas such as the Greater Toronto Area, Vancouver and Montreal, the region has had an influx of many ethnic groups with various cultural cemetery customs.

Small community graveyards containing a few hundred souls have given way to major cemetery and funeral companies.

"There will be no more one-acre, two-acre cemeteries any more. They are a thing of the past, as far as I'm concerned. That's my thought," Reesor said while standing just outside



STAFF PHOTO/NICK IWANYSHYN

Don Reesor, a grave digger for more than 30 years who owns DRX in Whitchurch-Stouffville, shares his perspective on the industry during a break from his work at the Dickson Hill Cemetery Monday. To read last week's story on this issue, go to: [bit.ly/1WLh9en](http://bit.ly/1WLh9en)

the fence of the 204-year-old Dickson Hill Cemetery just off Hwy. 48 near 19th Avenue in Markham, where he also sits on the board of directors.

"It will be 100-acre, 200-acre commercial cemeteries and the big guys are going to be running them. I'm third generation (as a grave digger). There could be another generation that does it, but it's a dying thing."

A new cemetery needs analysis, authored by consultant LEES + Associates Architects and Planners, warns of an impending shortage of cemetery land in York.

While there is enough cemetery land in the region overall to meet the needs for the next 25 years, the report warns of a critical shortage is on the horizon in some communities and among some religious groups.

Strange to think of Canada, with its abundance of land, running out of cemetery space, but major urban centres such as Toronto and Vancouver are beginning to feel the crunch of dwindling graveyard room, said

Gary Carmichael, vice-president of government and corporate affairs with Arbor Memorial, which has 41 cemeteries, 28 crematoria and 92 funeral homes across Canada, including in Newmarket, Stouffville, Markham and Woodbridge. An application for a cemetery with 50 acres of burial space in Dickson Hill is now before the Ontario Municipal Board.

"When you think of Canada, if I can get on my soap box for half a second, you think of this great, wide, expansive land, but cemeteries are regulated land use. So, it's not like you can just go out into the forest and bury somebody," Carmichael said.

But while lack of cemetery land may be just making its way onto the radar screen in Canada, it has long been an issue in other parts of the world, experts said.

"Increasingly, this is a problem affecting mega-cities. Mega-cities have been completely taken over by the scale of demand. Burial space hasn't kept pace. There is a need for step-change in the way they are trying to deal with that

as an issue," Julie Rugg, a senior research fellow at the University of York's Cemetery Research Group in England, said.

"In all of these places, you see cemetery provision is creaking under the weight of demand and they really have to think strategically about how to deal with it."

Different cities and countries face different challenges, including "archaic" laws banning re-using graves, a lack of land, financial hardship in purchasing new property, regulatory hurdles, a reluctance by politicians to plan for cemeteries and often no laws forcing them to address the issue, Rugg said, adding Scotland has just passed legislation requiring local governments to deal with cemetery space.

Although cremation rates are rising worldwide, communities around the world have resorted to creative means to make the most of their limited cemetery lands.

While owning a cemetery plot in perpetuity is the law in Ontario, residents of some European countries only buy a cemetery plot for a

certain number of years.

If the family doesn't continue to pay for the space, the grave is reused for someone else.

About a century ago, land-squeezed San Francisco relocated its cemeteries to a community about 10 miles south.

In Hong Kong, families store ashes in funeral homes, waiting years for a space in a public or private cemetery to open up.

The lack of cemetery land is not an issue discussed much among average residents in Brazil or covered in the media, Daniel Cabral, a tour guide in Rio de Janeiro, said.

However, he pointed out the city has just welcomed a vertical cemetery, featuring a chapel, lagoon, peacock garden, waterfalls, an aviary with parrots and toucans and a small restaurant.

"The lack of space and security in large cities made verticalization the ideal solution for the construction of cemeteries, a trend that can be observed in the U.S., Japan and in Brazil in some cities such as Sao

See page B6.

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CEMETERY CHALLENGE — A SERIES

## ‘Death always wins. Everybody dies’

Discussion comes as York Region leaders try to address the issue of what to do about its dead

BY LISA QUEEN  
 lqueen@yrmg.com

Everyone wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die.

That provocative issue was part of an interfaith discussion, at times purposeful and other times light-hearted, exploring the meaning of death and immortality from the perspective of Christian, Jewish and Muslim religions.

Hosted by Mosaic Interfaith, a group of York Region residents of many religions including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism, and the Organization for Islamic Learning, the event Monday night at St. Luke's Catholic Church in Thornhill included about 100 people of all faiths.

It featured guest speakers Rabbi Michael Stroh, rabbi emeritus with Temple Har Zion, Rev. Canon John Hill, a presbyter with the Anglican Archdiocese of Toronto, and professor Liyakat Takim, the Sharjah Chair in Global Islam at McMaster University.

Death and immortality are issues that touch a nerve with people like no other, Stroh said.

"There is no other topic that raises as much anxiety and ambivalence other than a discussion of death," he said.

"We all find ourselves in a battle of the forces of life against the forces of death... There is a tragic dimension to life because, at least apparently, death always wins. Everybody and everything dies."

The discussion comes as York Region leaders try to address the issue of what to do about the region's dead.

About 232,000 York residents will die over the next quarter century.

While there is enough cemetery land overall to accommodate them, a cemetery needs analysis by consultant LEES + Associates Architects and Planners flagged a number of concerns.

For example, Newmarket is in urgent need of new cemetery lands.

Georgina, East Gwillimbury, Aurora and Richmond Hill will soon reach a critical stage, according to the report, which some in the cemetery industry praised as possibly the first municipal comprehensive review of cemetery lands in Canada.

Some religious communities, notably Roman Catholics, are running out of dedicated cemetery lands, the analysis said.

Adding to the pressure is the fact that Toronto is running out of graveyard space and more residents will



STAFF PHOTO/LISA QUEEN

Abdul Aziz Dewjee, president of the Organization for Islamic Learning, speaks about death and immortality at St. Luke's Catholic Church in Thornhill Monday night.

have to be buried outside the city, it added.

Given the fact that it usually takes more than a decade to locate land, get approvals and build a new cemetery, many experts in the field are growing increasingly concerned about running out of graveyards in the region.

While experts have praised the region for taking the lead on the issues, they have also expressed frustration that municipal politicians, in general, don't plan for cemeteries as they do with houses, hospitals, schools, recreations centres and other amenities that support growing communities.

Because graveyards don't pay property taxes, cemeteries aren't welcome the same way other types of development are, they said.

As far as we know, humans are the only living creatures aware of our mortality, Stroh told the audience Monday night.

"Everything that we do is shaped in the face of death. Death is not something that happens at the end, we're always conscious of it. That's why we take out insurance, that why we look when we cross the street," he said.

"Does immortality answer the tragedy of death? In other words, if you believe that in some way you will live forever, does that

remove the tragedy of death? Does it become OK? If we live forever, what will it be like? Surely, it won't be exactly the same as now."

People experience an enduring sense of longing on Earth at what we are missing here and what is hinted at after we die, Hill said.

"Heaven is not actually another place like a distant galaxy... Heaven is where God dwells eternally... We like to hijack the notion of heaven and turn it into a place of wish fulfillment," he said.

"It also turns into a contrivance for denial, our mortality. This commonly takes the form of a naive certainty that when we die, our life will simply carry on in some new, comfortable, resort-like setting, accompanied by relatives, at least the ones we like, and perhaps a pet dog... It's painful, in fact, to imagine the end of relationships. It's difficult to imagine simply ceasing to exist."

We are mortal, made of dust and to dust we shall return, Hill said. At the same time, when Jesus was asked if the eternal God would abandon his friends at the time of death, Jesus said He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living, Hill said.

"Only trust in God can really quell our fears of death. Mere speculations about heaven are a pretty flimsy foundation for hope.

For Jesus, heaven was certainly not a place to escape to while this world goes to hell in a hand basket."

However, over the centuries, the Christian church has hijacked the idea of heaven by using it as an instrument of control, Hill said.

"When the Jesus movement became part of the establishment, the hope of heaven and the fear of hell became the perfect tool for terrifying people into conformity," he said.

"Unless you believe what the church teaches and do what the church commands, you're going to hell." Of course, nobody could prove that, but, then again, nobody could disprove it either, which made it a perfect tool for social dominance."

The most important thing that Christians learned from Jesus is how to die because He died courageously, trusting that the sacrifice of His life would unlock the prison of fear in which humanity is locked, Hill said.

For Muslims, death is not extinction, but an alternate state of being, Takim said.

When someone dies, the first words Muslims say is, "From God we come and to Him we shall return. That is meaning a return from where we came," he said.

The Qur'an sees death as an

encounter, not with God, but with angels, Takim said.

"Death is a continuation of life in a different form. The reference and reminders of death are simply to take death seriously because there is a sense of accountability in Islam that after we die, before we go to either heaven or hell, that God will account for us," he said.

"Death challenges us to morally elevate ourselves above our mundane existence because death is connected to accountability."

It is important for people of different faiths to come together to talk about meaningful issues such as death, Natalie Doucet, a pastoral associate at St. Luke's, said.

"In a world defined by pluralism, the need for interfaith dialogue is now greater than ever. A true dialogue is aimed at gaining understanding and acceptance in spite of differences of opinion and convictions," she said.

"Genuine dialogue leaves itself open to other people's views, while, at the same time, exploring our common ground and building on that. I believe that events such as the one we are having today promotes genuine dialogue and is one of the most effective weapons in the struggle against ignorance, prejudice, intolerance and fanaticism... In the end, we are one human family under God."

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