

Thomson TRADEWINDS

DAVID & MARY THOMSON C.I. ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2013

Going...Going...?

As we announced on our alumni website last November, the final hurdles have been cleared to gain approval for a new collegiate to be built on the Bendale-Thomson-Donwood-Highbrook property. If planning and construction schedules are maintained, the new school will be open for the 2015-2016 academic year.



Thomson principal, **Soriana Mantini**, shared her excitement for the future in a recent interview. However, since this is an alumni newsletter, you may wish to hear first about what will happen to the old school. Soriana was able to bring us up to date on those plans as well, and they may

not include demolishing the building.

When a school building is declared redundant, other school boards have the first right of refusal on taking over the facilities. The Catholic Board and the two French Boards (Public and Catholic) have been informed of the plans. It may be that one of them will wish to move in after Thomson moves out. Failing that, the general public will then gain access. The Lawrence Ave. frontage is zoned for residential or commercial, but not high-rise, so a town house complex might be one possibility if the Board sells the property to a developer. One thing is certain: the final classes are slated to be held in June, 2015.

Present plans call for the new composite community school to be built on the part of the property between Highbrook-Donwood and the present Thomson playing field, to create a closely-knit JK-12 campus. Donwood will become a JK-8 school, adding much of the Highbrook facility. Bendale will close (luckily, not before celebrating its 50th anniversary on May 11, 2013), but students living in the school area (about 300) will automatically move to the new school, and about 100 more will be able to choose

Thomson if it offers programs they are taking at Bendale.

The programs at the new school will continue to include all the traditional courses. The developmental disabilities program will increase to six classes. There will be special programs in environmental studies, health and well being, and culinary arts. Tech studies will support these programs. One major change will be the elimination of the auto shop and an emphasis on construction skills instead. A greenhouse and urban farm are under discussion.

The new facility will have two double gymnasias. Soriana, however, was disappointed to report that a “cafetorium” seems to be the best they can do for an assembly hall. It may be connected to a theatre arts room and able to be converted to a small lecture hall, but the music and drama people will likely not be happy. Unless a room is timetabled for use every day, it is hard to justify its inclusion. Businesses and other groups in the community have been invited to submit proposals (Co-Building Opportunities) for sharing the costs of any program they would like to sponsor.

The planning is all being handled by a Local School Community Design Team: the principals, support staff, teachers, trustee, superintendent, community members and the architects. Because two schools are being replaced, total membership on the team reaches close to forty. They have had three meetings at press time, normally one a month.

The team of ZAS Architects/Taylor Smyth Architects were chosen in September, because they have a proven record of design excellence and of adhering to project budgets and schedules. One of their projects, Bill Crothers Secondary School in Unionville, is shown, right. They will design a 178,000 square foot building on 15 acres of land. The Ministry of Education



has allocated \$37.2 million dollars (and no more!) to the Toronto District School Board for the new school. That works out to a benchmark of \$179.00 per square foot, considerably less than the

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Profile: Gail (Roadknight) Schuit



It all began with an email from Gail Schuit to **William Stratas**, the webmaster for the Thomson Alumni website, asking if he had any contact information about two of her favourite teachers at Thomson, when she was a student there from 1968 to 1971. William passed the request on to **Stan Farrow**, who did some checking and got back to Gail. In the course of their email correspondence, Stan discovered that Gail has had a very interesting life, worthy of profiling on these pages.

Gail graduated from the four-year Business and Commerce program, so it is not surprising that one of the teachers she was asking about was **Jack Blanchet**. She remembers that he was “such a kind and gentle soul and always smelled like coffee and cinammon danish!” The other was her Grade 10 English teacher, **Marnie Wells**, whose “encouragement of my writing led me to continue with it to this day” as an “assignment writer for a Christian publication” and also simply writing “for my own pleasure.” She remembers that Miss Wells actually got married that summer, and the girls in Gail’s class gave her a bridal shower. “She was sweet and fun, and I always looked forward to her class.” When Gail

mentioned that she had not been able to attend Thomson’s various reunions because she lived in Kenya for over 20 years, Stan decided there must be a story there. So here it is:

Gail’s first job after graduation in 1971 was as Secretary to the Business Manager at Scripture Union, an international mission movement founded over 140 years ago and working in over 120 countries using the Bible to inspire children, young people and adults to know God. After two years there, she attended Ontario Bible College (then on Spadina Ave.), graduating from the “One Year Program.” She then worked for two years as a secretary in the Recreation and Parks Department at the Borough of Scarborough.

In 1976 she read an article in Africa Inland Mission’s magazine about Rift Valley Academy, a boarding school in Kenya for missionaries’ children. They needed an extra secretary for the following school year. In August, she was on her way. The school has 500 students in Grades 1-12 (website: www.rva.org). After her year there, Gail returned home as secretary in the executive offices of the Hudson’s Bay Company in downtown Toronto for two years. But she returned to RVA in the summer of 1979 as a dorm mom for 28 junior high girls. “Now that was an experience!” she admits - but she still counts many of the girls as her friends today. She also taught typing and shorthand (“Thank you, **Mr. Cornish!**”), remembering some old Remington typewriters (“makes me sound ancient!”).

During that year, she met **Don Schuit**, an American Phys Ed teacher and the son of missionaries who had worked in the Congo. They were married in Toronto in 1980, but continued to serve in Kenya for 23 years. Their various duties included dorm parenting of children in Grades 1-4; teaching Phys Ed; and acting as librarian, ESL teacher, kindergarten teacher, principal and activities director for Grades 1-6, and Bible teacher at the local schools. Both their children were born at the mission hospital. Today, their son, **Ben**, is Loans Coordinator at Baptist Bible College in Clarks Summit, PA, and their daughter, **Kimberly**, works at Prudential in Scranton, PA. The Schuits left Kenya in the summer of 2000 to manage Missionary Retreat Fellowship in Pennsylvania. There are eight homes for missionaries from all over the world to live in temporarily while on leave from their country of service (website: www.missionaryretreat.org).

There are times when Gail misses Kenya. A few years ago, when she took a seasonal job at a local mall, she spotted a delivery man who looked very Kenyan. She greeted him with, “Jambo, habari yako?” and he just about fell over. He obviously hadn’t met many people in Scranton who said hello to him in Swahili!

Gail admits that she was a pretty quiet and “uninvolved” student back at Thomson. There’s no grad photo of her in the 1971 yearbook, and in 1970, she’s tucked into the back row of B11A (right). So she thanks God for an amazing life that she never would have dreamed of in those days. Luckily she still has connections. Her best friend through high school was, and still is, **Marilyn Tomotsugu**. **Cathy Glover** has been a friend since childhood, when they both lived on Glebemount. And Gail still gets back to the GTA regularly to visit her mom and her youngest brother and his family, who live in Pickering. If her family and friends happen to share Gail’s amazement at how her life has developed, we’re sure they can also share in the pride for what she has accomplished.



And what was Stan Farrow able to discover in answer to Gail’s questions? Sadly, both **Mr. Blanchet** and **Miss Wells/Mrs. McVeigh** have both passed away. Mr. Blanchet served in the Business Department at Thomson from opening day, 1959 until his retirement in 1988. Stan had a very pleasant chat with his daughter, now living in her parents’ home, reminiscing about some of the unorthodox methods her dad employed to help sell tickets to just about any event at the school. He was also on call frequently at Christmas time to play Santa Claus. Miss Wells began her career at Thomson in 1968, the year Gail was in her English class. After the bridal shower (and the wedding!) she became Mrs. McVeigh and continued to teach at Thomson until 1974. By tracking down some fellow English teachers of Marnie’s, Stan was able to verify that

she had indeed died, far too young, apparently of a neurological disorder.

Our alumni data base is far from complete, but if you are trying to track down former classmates or teachers, you can do what Gail did. Contact our webmaster, and he will forward the request to someone on the alumni committee to check against our records. If we do have contact information, we will check to see if it is okay to have you make contact before either passing along the information or supplying your information to allow contact to be made. Even if we have sad news, as Stan and Gail discovered, you never know what might happen as a result.

Behind the Headlines

The March 7 edition of the Scarborough Mirror featured an article about **Dr. Paul Thistle** and his work in mission hospitals in Zimbabwe. Since Gail Schuit (page 2) had already filled us in on her years in Kenya, we thought we could turn our inside spread into an Africa edition by contacting Paul about his experiences. He was happy to respond.

Paul completed Grade 12 at Thomson in 1981 but actually finished his high school career at Winston Churchill Collegiate in 1982. He insists he was a bookworm type, being on the Reach for the Top and Math teams, but he did play bassoon in the band and in the pit orchestra for *Bye Bye Birdie* at Thomson in 1981. His friend, **Warren Viegas**, keeps him informed about developments at the school today.

After earning his M.D. from the U. of T. in 1989, Paul completed his specialty in obstetrics and gynaecology, followed by a few months of locum work at North York, Oakville and Timmins. But, even at university, he had experienced a sprinkling of overseas medical work as a summer student in the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan and later at a rural hospital in Java, Indonesia.

In 1995, at the peak of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa he accepted a position at the Salvation Army Howard Hospital in Zimbabwe, 80 kilometres north of the capital, Harare. He loved the work, providing all-too-rare health care to the local communities. He became the hospital's chief medical officer in 1999. He also met and married Pedrinah, a nurse-midwife at the hospital. They and their two sons, James and Alexander, are pictured in the Mirror article, right. In 2008, Paul was chosen as the first recipient of the Teasdale-Corti Humanitarian Award, created by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada to recognize Canadian physicians who go beyond the usual call of duty to deliver health care world-wide.

In 2012, a dispute over hospital financing prompted the Salvation Army to post Paul back to Canada. However, he and Pedrinah felt their education, talents and experience were more suited to continuing work in rural Zimbabwe. So they severed ties with the Salvation Army, not without sad farewells to colleagues and the community, and took up a posting at Karanda Mission Hospital "in a remote area of northern Zimbabwe nearest to Mount Darwin...approximately 200 kilometres from Harare."

One thing didn't change in the new locale: the shortage, common to all mission hospitals, of medical and surgical supplies. There are also financial demands involved in HIV/AIDS projects and orphan care. Paul says he has kept a wish list during all his years in Zimbabwe, and uses it as a guide whenever groups such as the Rotary Club, as well as individuals, ask him what they can do to help. If you would like to contact him, his email address is <drpthistle@gmail.com>.



Paul's 1981 Thomson yearbook photo

When the children reach post-graduate education levels, Paul and Pedrinah may have a decision to make about leaving Zimbabwe, at least temporarily, if it will better their sons' futures. In the immediate future, there is a visit back home slated for this coming June.

Paul remembers his days at Thomson as "great, formative years. The Thomson spirit was such that kids from middle class families in Scarborough could reach for the stars. We could excel beyond our wildest dreams and expectations, encouraged by a staff of dedicated teachers in a caring community. I wonder if young people today are too distracted to dream." As for Paul, he admits that his "wildest dream" landed him in "the 'wilds' of Zimbabwe!" He knows that sick people seeking attention can be found in every corner of the world, at home and abroad, but he feels he has achieved his goal of serving where the needs are greatest.

Scarborough doctor nears two decades of serving in Zimbabwe

NORM NELSON
nelson@scmirror.com

A Scarborough doctor who once canvassed subscriptions for *The Scarborough Mirror* newspaper as a youth is back doing what has become his life's calling—serving in a remote hospital in Zimbabwe.

Dr. Paul Thistle is closing in on almost two decades in the country—almost as long as he spent growing up in Scarborough where his parents, now retired, still live in the Midland and Lawrence area.

"They have lived at the same address for 39 years," said Thistle, who attended David and Mary Thomson Collegiate from Grades 9 to 12, and then Grade 13 at St. Winston Churchill Collegiate which he graduated in 1981.

Dr. Thistle married a nurse he met in Zimbabwe, Pedrinah, and the couple have two children, James and Alexander.

HUMANITARIAN AWARD

In 2008, the University of Toronto-trained doctor was chosen as the inaugural recipient of the Teasdale-Corti Humanitarian Award, created by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada to recognize Canadian physicians who go beyond normal expectations to deliver health care worldwide.

He is now working at Karanda Mission Hospital, described on its own website as being "in a remote area of northern Zimbabwe nearest to Mount Darwin...approximately 200 kilometres from the Capital of Harare."

A general medical surgi-



Dr. Paul Thistle with his wife Pedrinah, whom he met in Zimbabwe, and their two sons, James and Alexander. Thistle serves in a remote Zimbabwe hospital

cal hospital, Thistle, in the recent interview, conducted through email, said "we treat just about everything from A to Z, from anaemia to zoster. Throw in a few snake bites and some close encounters of a crocodile kind."

His previous posting was at the Howard Hospital, another similar remote mission hospital 60-kilometres north of Harare run by the Salvation Army. Thistle, a Salvation Army captain, had served there as a doctor since arriving in the country in 1993 and as its chief medical officer since 1999.

But he was abruptly forced to leave last August, after apparently raising questions over hospital financing. His abrupt removal sparked protests both amongst hospital staff and the surrounding

community, and the police were sent in and arrests made, sparking headlines both in Zimbabwe and in Canada.

STAYED IN ZIMBABWE

Through official media releases, the Salvation Army said it had conducted an investigation and found everything in order.

It acknowledged the work carried out by Dr. Thistle but said he was being posted back to Canada for reassignment—something it said was routine amongst its medical missionaries.

Thistle and his wife chose to remain in Zimbabwe, effectively cutting their ties with the Salvation Army. Of this split, now more than half a year ago, he would only say: "2012 was a tumultuous

year of change for the Thistle family, personally and professionally, as summarized in the sudden departure from Howard Hospital and the local and international entry that ensued."

Asked whether coming back to Canada was ever a consideration, he replied in the email interview:

"I haven't thought about this, and will be more willing to do so when my children are older and enrol in postgraduate education, preferably in Canada."

VISIT HOME

"For the moment my wife, Pedrinah, and I, feel that our education and experience are most suited in rural Zimbabwe where there are under-served people and few health care workers. Pedrinah is a nurse-midwife."

A visit, however, may soon be in the cards. "I hope to come home in June for a month or so."

Dr. Thistle has inspired a lot of fundraising here in Canada, including the Rotary Club. For those who wish to keep supporting his work, he advised:

"I have been keeping a 'Wish List' for the last 18 years in Zimbabwe, and not surprisingly the contents of the list did not change with my move to Kananaskis..."

"Mission hospitals always are short of basic medical and surgical supplies, and then there are our projects in HIV/AIDS and orphan care out in the villages."

"I invite your readers to contact me directly, if interested."

For more on Dr. Paul Thistle's work in Zimbabwe and how you can help, he can be contacted at drpthistle@gmail.com

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Board has been used to. The architects, however, have been used to working within this limitation, and, after touring a number of their schools, Soriana is very impressed with the bright, positive atmosphere they create in the buildings. They are also masters at planning, flexibility, so that spaces can be utilized in different ways, depending on need. The new school will also be a very "green" project. Expected capacity will be 1,509 students (what if they're nine short?). Street access to the school will be gained by extending Rushley Dr. through the property to link up with a new roadway east from Midland Ave. on part of the Bendale site.

Our alumni hope for a "heritage area" honouring the two old schools may be limited by the projected budget and the fact that two schools are involved. But Soriana supports our other alumni wish: a final farewell "party" in 2015. She'd like to see planning for the new school completed and shovels in the ground before we tackle that project, but stay tuned! Watch our website (www.thomsonforever.ca) for updates, or you can google "Bendale-Thomson Project" to check developments.

Congratulations!



The first Canadian Screen Awards have just been presented (combining the former Gemini and Genie awards), and Thomson alumnus **Brett Sullivan** (Class of 1983) was among the inaugural winners: Best Dramatic Editing, for an episode of the popular *Flashpoint* television series. Over the years, he has edited numerous features and over 100 hours of television. He received, respectively, Genie and Gemini

nominations in 2001 for *Ginger Snaps* and *Lucky Girl*. He won a Gemini award in 1996 for Best Picture Editing in a Dramatic Program or Series for *Psi Factor*.

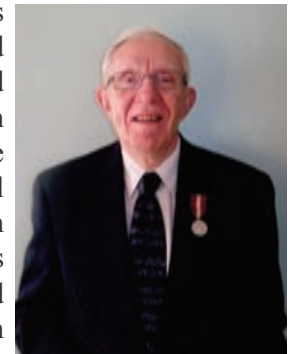
In 1998 he wrote and directed his first short film, *Shudder*, followed by *6ix* in 1999 and *The Promise*, starring Gordon and Leah Pinsent, in 2001. He also attended the Director's Resident Programme at the Canadian Film Centre in 2001. *Ginger Snaps II: Unleashed* (2004), his feature directorial debut, was an incredible success critically and at the box office. It continues to be a festival favourite world-wide, as well as a hot DVD seller. His second feature, *The Chair*, an über-low budget indie film (shot in his own house) has been sold world-wide and received many international awards,

including Best Director at the Canadian Film Festival and Best Feature at several other festivals.

Brett has directed many television episodes, including *The Border*, *Flashpoint*, *Cracked*, *Lost Girl*, and *Orphan Black*. So keep watching for his name in the credits of upcoming films and TV series.

Brett has many happy memories of Thomson, where he feels the path was laid, in a supportive environment, for seeking a career that has been enjoyable and rewarding. While the path sometimes leads away from old friends and towards new ones, the old ones are still there when the occasion arises. We offer congratulations on Brett's success.

One of Thomson's former staff members, **Stan Farrow**, who just happens to edit this newsletter, was among the proud recipients of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal, presented to Stan at a late-February ceremony in the Scarborough Southwest federal riding. The medal, which Stan is wearing in the photo, honours "significant contributions and achievements by Canadians" in bettering their community and their country. Well done!



In Memoriam



William (Bill) Allen, (left), applied his steady and steady hand as a drafting teacher at Thomson from 1967 to his retirement in 1986. We found out about his death too late for the last issue, but wish to offer our belated sympathy to his family and friends. During his career at Thomson, he contributed his talents beyond the classroom to such widely varied fields as coaching hockey and helping design sets for stage productions. And, as a paid-up member of Thomson Alumni, he kept in touch through this newsletter.

Following our fall news of the death of **Walter London**, Thomson's first Head of History, we received the following tribute from **Mike Walker** (Class of 1962): "I had known of Mr. London at R. H. King, but at Thomson he was my history teacher in 1959-60. That year set the basis of my understanding of modern European history, which stood me in good stead during my eight years of military service in the UK, Germany, the former Yugoslavia and Cyprus. I am deeply thankful that at the 2009 reunion I had the opportunity to express my gratitude in person. He was a no-nonsense guy - and he will always have my deepest admiration."

Pub Night May 3 - New Location

For alumni in the GTA, it's time for your annual fix of catching up on news while enjoying a few drinks and/or munchies, etc. at our Spring Pub Night on Friday, May 3. We're going to try out a new location this time, thanks to the connections of Alumni committee member, **Bob Forrest**. His antique and classic car club holds weekly cruises in the parking lot of Eglinton Square each summer, and they're found Route 66 Grill and Bar to be a perfect spot to meet after the evening show. **Nigel Hutchinson**, the manager, will be setting an area aside for us, and will see that we are well looked after. As usual, arrival time can be from 8 pm, staying as late as you and Nigel can handle.

Eglinton Square is a covered mall on the south side of Eglinton Ave. between Victoria Park and Pharmacy. Route 66 is on the south side of the mall. Enter the parking lot at the stoplight on Pharmacy Ave. south of Eglinton. The bar's main entrance can be accessed directly from the lot or you can enter from the mall's food court.

