

– special edition –

PICKERING AIRPORT CANCELLED!



Photo: Alexis Whalen

Transport Minister Anita Anand at the announcement. Three of the other speakers that day, l-r: Minister Gary Anandasangaree (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs), Minister Steven Guilbeault (Environment and Climate Change), and Jennifer O'Connell (MP for Pickering-Uxbridge).

On January 27, 2025, before a standing-room-only crowd at Pickering Glen Golf Club, Transport Minister Anita Anand confirmed the news just shared by our MP, Jennifer O'Connell: that the Pickering airport was dead! The hall erupted multiple times in deafening cheers, shouts, and prolonged applause. Many in the audience had waited 53 years for this moment.

The choice of venue (formerly called Glen Cedars) was significant. In 2013, Transport Canada had held information sessions there after the disclosure by the Harper government's finance minister, Jim Flaherty, that the airport would indeed be built, and that its construction would be starting soon.

Flaherty's words had triggered shock-waves of fear and anger, and had galvanized the community to fight back (again). Anand's announcement, on the other hand, left us elated, relieved, and dazed (after so long, the news was hard to take in). We heard that "the vast majority" of the Lands will go into Rouge National Urban Park and will continue to be farmed. The best future use for the remaining land has yet to be settled.

Indigenous and local stakeholder consultations will be held "very soon" and we will be there to fight for the permanent protection of this rich, rare farmland. Ironically, this Class 1 soil still exists only because a 1972 airport plan never saw the light of day.

PHASE 1: POP'S HISTORIC WIN, 1975

For three and a half frantic years, People or Planes fought the airport with public rallies, inventive stunts, interventions at public inquiries, and much more. They never let up. Meanwhile, a shadowy parallel group, the self-named, self-appointed, influential Metropolitan Toronto Airport Review Committee (MTARC), was arming itself with technical facts and arguments to show the Davis government how Ottawa was misleading Ontario as to the need for, and the cost of, the proposed airport. MTARC's actions were pivotal. Ontario pulled out of the deal to provide airport infrastructure, forcing the federal government to shelve the airport plan. The folks at the Department of Transport never figured out that MTARC was a wing of POP.

For obvious reasons, there are no photos of the MTARC team at work, but POP's public face was recorded in detail in those final days, when three brave POP women took part in the **Last Stand**.



Brenda Davies reacts upon seeing the destruction of a house near the farm of Edna Mae and Ernie Carruthers, whose home is next on the bulldozers' list.



COUNTDOWN: THE LAST 12 DAYS

Straight from a "people/planes" broadsheet, March 18, 1976

Day 12: 2,000 POP supporters celebrate Ernie Carruthers' courage in a **TRIBUTE TO ERNIE** – 1 day before Feds take over his 119 year old farmhouse. 500 new names added to list of 800 people willing to lie down in front of bulldozers. Frances Moore, Anne Howes, Brenda Davies are smuggled into Ernie's house.

Day 11: Federal Property Manager demands women leave. Women refuse. Government harassment begins ... massive machinery moves onto property for soil tests. **CAR CAVALCADE** through site to show support of sitin.

Day 10: Government cuts off power and heat. **CAR CAVALCADE** brings wood and candles. Ernie provides water from well. Sounds of heavy machinery at night, interrupts sleep. POP men organize night vigil.

Day 9: Gov. admits Carruthers farm "missed" in Architectural and Historical survey. Gov. sets up roadblocks to farmhouse. **POP HORSEBRIGADE** organized.

Day 8: **ELECTION DAY ... GODFREY WINS!!!** in Durham West. **CAR CAVALCADE BRINGS NEWS TO "bulldozer ladies"**. Gov. plans to lock women out when they go to vote. Women voted in advance poll.

Day 7: **CAR CAVALCADE** brings wood stove to supplement fireplace. Women bake cookies for soil testers.

Day 6: Soil testers down 1 foot ... water ... water ... water. Hundreds join **CAR CAVALCADE** in POP demonstration including newly elected MPPs Alf Stong and David Warner.

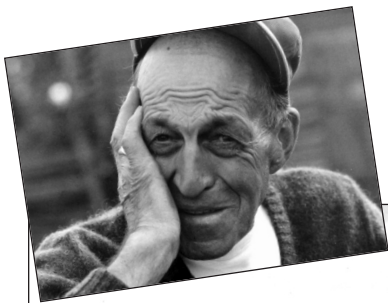
Day 5: **CAR CAVALCADE** brings fresh fruit, vegetables, flowers. **TORONTO ISLANDERS** bring quilt made by 75 Island families.

Day 4: Whitchurch-Stouffville sends letter to Minister of Justice to **STOP AIRPORT** as constituting "a public nuisance".

Day 3: Gov. cuts off farmhouse telephone. Brenda sets up her **HAM** radio.

Day 2: **CAR CAVALCADE** meets roadblocks and security guards on airport roads. Aldermen W. Kilborne and J. Trimmer crash road barricade in truck. Premier Davis says Ontario will refuse to provide support services. Sitins serve **BARRICADE STEW** to visitors.

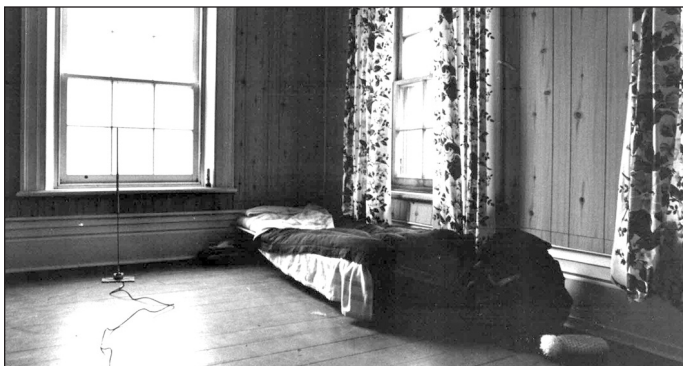
Day 1: Marchand shelves Pickering.
POP GOES THE AIRPORT.



Crowds gather for the Tribute to Ernie.
Right: Anne, Frances, and Brenda, the women of the Last Stand.

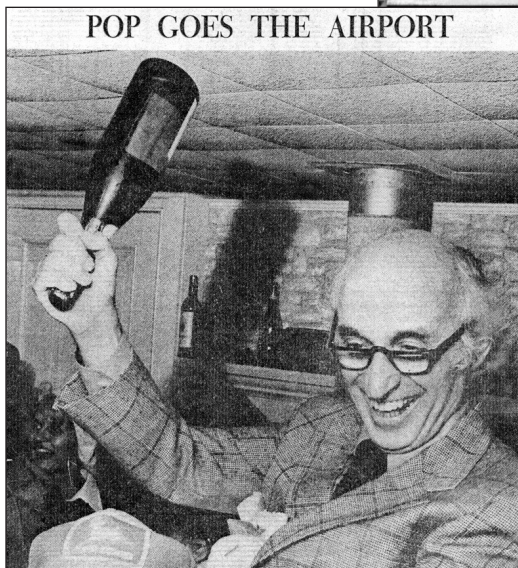


Life inside during the 11-day standoff.
Bottom left: The day the airport is shelved. Free to go!



POP's chair, Dr Charles Godfrey, celebrates a well-deserved victory.

Postscript: Ernie's house still stands and is now in Rouge National Urban Park. We hope it will soon be restored.



PHASE 2: LOL'S HISTORIC WIN, 2025

March 1, 2025. It was a day of bittersweet memories, heartfelt hugs, laughter through tears, and standing ovations. A day for meeting allies, perhaps in person for the first time, and for reconnecting with comrades-without-arms for the first time in half a century.

But above all it was a party!

The cavernous Claremont Community Centre was packed with original members of People or Planes, their children and grandchildren, and families who had been expropriated 53 years ago for an airport that was never built and for a city to support it. On March 1, 1972, news of the plan had been leaked in the *Globe and Mail*. On March 2, the official letters had shown up in mailboxes. And on March 3, shocked and fearful residents had gathered – and the result was POP.

Five decades on, there was no press release. This was not a media event. The speeches were honest and emotional, the gratitude was genuine, the ache was from the heart and the laughter from the belly.

Winter travel, old age, illness, and distance kept many folks from attending. So many messages began with ‘how I wish I could be there!’ Still, they came, with walkers and canes and huge smiles. Chris Kahn brought a big red sign with white block letters, reading ‘WE WILL NOT BE MOVED’. “It’s been hanging in my basement for 50 years!” Jim Sanders pushed his walker with two original POP signs in the basket.



Corrie Almack went home to get the huge ‘weapons’ fashioned from farm equipment that Bill Lishman and Mike Robertson had carried when patrolling the

government offices, and which had been hanging for decades in a place of honour at the home of Lorne Almack, POP leader and LOL’s first Honourary Chair.



Crispin Pemberton-Pigott, son of the late great Brenda Davies – she of the airplane hat and Last Stand fame – flew in from Edmonton for the day, with his guitar. His rendition of Brenda’s ‘A Runway Runs Through the Middle of Our House’ brought the house down!



A slide show on auto-loop was filled with the faces of 53 years of advocacy. A ‘swag’ table offered POP and LOL memorabilia – buttons, t-shirts, vision maps. On the stage, five decades of artefacts were on display, stopping many in their tracks as they marvelled at the tenacity, creativity, and sheer genius behind the fight.

Jim Sanders / Chris Kahn / Corrie and Bob Almack / Crispin Pemberton-Pigot

After an hour of greetings and reminiscing, the speeches began with a sustained standing ovation for our MP and long-time ally, Jennifer O’Connell (*below*), who, together with other Ottawa politicians, had brought us across the finish line with the announcement on January 27 that any plans for an airport in Pickering were officially dead – grounded for good!



‘Grounded for Good’ is what we called our celebration. It was the theme of all the speeches: how a truly terrible idea eventually resulted in the creation of a national park and the protection of the largest publicly owned parcel of farmland in Canada – land that, without a doubt, would otherwise have been lost to sprawl. That message of protecting critical farmland and green-space was repeated by every speaker – Senator Rob Black and the Honourable(s) Gary Anandasangaree, David Crombie, Pauline Browes – all of whom began by thanking half a century of relentless citizen action.



Senator Rob Black
Hon. Gary Anandasangaree



Hon. David Crombie
Hon. Pauline Browes



Past LOL Chair Mary Delaney reminded everyone that those who were expropriated are owed, at the very least, an apology, and that those who fought back are owed our unending gratitude. What they did then made possible everything that's been done since. But she also made clear that even the creation of a national park could never make up for the original cruel and unjustified wrong committed in 1972.

Current LOL Chair Alexis Whalen rounded out the speeches with an emotional toast to the dedicated multitude of 'hummingbirds' who unfailingly, over 53 years, had brought their drops of water to fight this fire. She also reminded us that, while the work to fight an airport is over, the work to permanently protect the farmland is not.

... *Not yet.*



Among the crowd at the celebration:

Laurie Barclay / Myrna and Gord McGregor / Marie and Anita, daughters of Rosemarie "I Can't Milk Planes" Herrell

PHASE 3: THE FINAL WIN – SAVING THE REST

In 1976, right after the airport was shelved, Lorne Almack wrote: "It is POP's objective to [dedicate] 18,600 acres of airport site to agricultural uses for the production of produce for present and future generations of Torontonians." His words laid the foundation for all the advocacy that followed, especially the 'ag-vocacy' of Land Over Landings.

Then, now, next – the message was, is, and always will be the same. With the Pickering airport finally grounded for good, our next efforts will go to ensuring the preservation of the remaining Federal Lands as a secure food and water resource for Canada's largest urban area. When we win this phase, our objectives (and POP's) will have been achieved.