

## Patio languishes without permits

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*VINCE TALOTTA/TORONTO STARS* Sam Sinnthurai, owner of McGradies Tap and Grill in Scarborough, says he spent \$7,000 to get his patio ready for the summer, and now can't open it. (July 2, 2009)

The chairs are ready for customers. The railings gleam in the sun. The liquor licence is approved. It looks like the perfect summer patio.

But much to the chagrin of Sam Sinnthurai, owner of McGradies Tap and Grill at Victoria Park Ave. and Ellesmere Rd., the restaurant's brand new patio sits empty.

Sinnthurai can't let his patrons onto the patio until he gets fire and safety approvals from the city. But with civic workers on strike, he's not expecting that to happen anytime soon.

"I feel very bad. I'm a hardworking man and we're losing business," said Sinnthurai, noting that he spent \$7,000 to get the patio ready for summer. "People keep asking me if they can go out and eat and I have to tell them no."

Sinnthurai isn't the only business person to have been hard hit by the city strike, now in its 12th day. Across the city, business owners and residents who rely on city inspections, building permits, contracts – even marriage licences – are having to put things on hold, resulting in lost time and money. During the strike the city isn't conducting zoning reviews, issuing occupancy permits or carrying out inspections of unfinished buildings.

That means homeowners who, like Matthew Alexander, are in the midst of renovations have to wait for the strike to end before work can continue.

Alexander has been waiting almost a week for a city inspector to approve a basement plumbing and drain renovation at his Eglinton West home. After spending \$19,000 to dig up his basement and stop water from leaking in, he can't put in a new concrete floor or a water heater until an inspector signs off on the work.

Until then, Alexander, his wife and his two young boys, aged 1 and 3, will continue living with family in Richmond Hill.

"It's a big inconvenience," he said. "We don't want to move in without hot water. We're now at a stage where we could move in quickly if we could finish the basement. It's frustrating."

Stephen Dupuis, president of the Building Industry and Land Development Association, notes that the city will allow construction companies to hire third-party inspectors, such as engineering firms, in place of city inspectors, on condition that inspection records are submitted to the city for approval after the labour disruption. But that means that construction companies must shell out more for private inspectors.

Still, construction will continue, he says.

"There's not a massive stress on the system over 11 or 12 days, but that could change if it's a prolonged strike," he

said.

Paul May, of Funland Outdoor Amusements, one of Ontario's largest midway companies, says the business has already lost \$200,000 because it can't get the permits needed to set up in city parks, operate rides and hire police. His company has already lost the East York Canada Day celebrations and the Scarborough Rib Fest thanks to the strike.

"It's screwed things up. This year we decided to stay close to home and just work in the Toronto area. I guess we picked a bad year," said May, noting that Funland does about 27 shows a year. He expects that number to decrease if the strike continues much longer.

Last week, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which represents 4,000 small and medium-sized businesses in Toronto, launched a campaign encouraging the province to legislate striking city workers back to work.

The federation's Ontario director, Satinder Chera, says business owners have started to voice concerns over how the strike, particularly the piling garbage, might affect their businesses in Toronto.

"They're having to explain these circumstances to out-of-town customers, who are then choosing not to come into the city," Chera said. "The reputation of the city is going down the toilet because of what's happening here."

Chera says he's even heard from wedding planners who can't obtain marriage licences or photography permits for city parks.

"They're having to go outside the city to neighbouring jurisdictions. That's great for businesses in the 905 area, but it means Toronto is losing out," he said. "There are some pretty beautiful sites here in Toronto, and essentially they can't be utilized."