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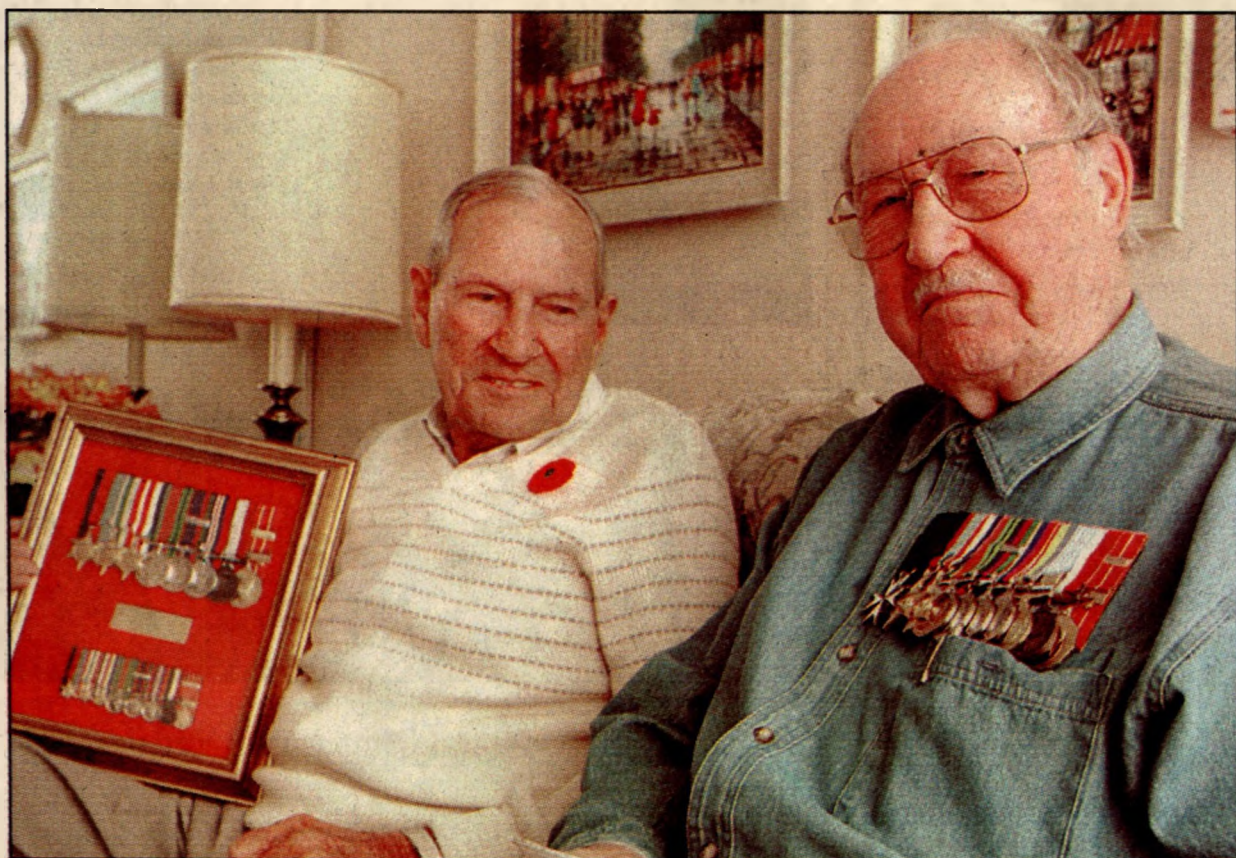
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John McCormick and Andrew Ritchie: just steps from where they met.

Photo by Peter C. McCusker

Army buddies reunited in retirement residence

John McCormick and Andrew Ritchie first met at Oakville's Ortona Barracks 50 years ago and after seeing one another only infrequently since then, both were reunited when each chose to live at the Kensington, a stone's throw from the Bond Street barracks where they met

By Nancy Alexander
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

It was over 50 years ago that two young men, newly returned from the war, sat on apple crates at the old Ortona Barracks in Oakville and struck up a friendship that would last a lifetime.

Andrew Ritchie and John McCormick could never have guessed, as careers sent them in different directions, that their lives would be linked once again as the century comes to a close.

In one of life's happy coincidences, Andrew, 85, and John, 79, both returned to live in Oakville recently, and this time the accommodation is a little more comfortable than apple crates.

Unbeknown to one another, both men came to live at the Kensington Retirement Residence on Lakeshore Road, arriving only a few months apart. Unbelievably, they were also both assigned to the same dining table.

"It was a great stroke of luck. God must have smiled on us," says Andrew. "The odds must be one in a million," adds John, as the two sit together once again, sharing their memories of war and so much more.

Andrew had joined the army in 1940 as a private after working in oil fields and cattle ranches in Alberta. Disturbed by the news of war, he joined the Canadian Army and spent five-and-a-half years overseas.

After returning from Europe, Andrew was transferred to Ontario's Central Army Command Post in Oakville and promoted to the rank of Assistant Provost Marshall Major.

"It was my job to ensure that the soldiers abided by the army's rules," recalls Andrew. "The model for my corps was 'discipline by example. You can't be a leader unless you lead yourself'."

(Three years ago, at the age of 82, Andrew published a book, *Watchdog, A History of the Canadian Provost Corps*, detailing the birth and growth of that organization.)

John's reason for joining the army was more unique. It was his love for hockey that influenced him to join. After losing both his parents by the age of 16, John was sent to a Jesuit school where he loved to play hockey. While at school, he learned about the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals (RCCS) and their need for a hockey player.

"When I found out that joining the RCCS also entitled me to three meals a day, clothing and pay, I was sold," says John.

John later enrolled in the Canadian Active Service Force in 1939 and attained the rank of Warrant Officer Class 2, providing communication support for Canadian Armoured Divisions in battle. When he returned to Canada from overseas in 1945, he was promoted to the rank of Warrant Officer 1 and was soon transferred to the Oakville Headquarters, acting as the link between the soldiers and the generals.

(See 'Military' page 5)

Residents leery of homeless shelter

By Sandra Omand
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

Residents living near Grace House fear turning the two-storey dwelling into temporary short-term emergency housing for the homeless will only bring drugs, noise and problems to the neighbourhood.

Attending a public information meeting held by the Town at the Oakville Municipal Building on Monday night, six people voiced their concerns over the types of people who would be using Grace House.

"My biggest concern is, if you have a lot of young guys, what about the noise and the disturbances," said an unidentified woman whose house is directly across from the proposed facility.

Grace House, a stately century home long past its glory days, is currently functioning as a group home for people with mental health issues and is in the process of being sold. The group home, run by a local charitable agency called Grace House Incorporated, is moving to a new building on Cornwall. Located on Old Mill Road the house is being proposed as an emergency solution to avert a homeless crisis over the cold winter months while the Town amends its by-laws to permit the development of a permanent short-term shelter.

Ever since a study conducted by the Region last April identified an urgent need for short-term emergency housing in Oakville, the Town has been left scrambling. All attempts to establish a permanent shelter were thwarted by Oakville's by-laws that do not permit such dwellings in either residential or commercial areas.

"We have been trying to find a solution, but by-laws in this town are so tight that no matter what we wanted to do we had to get them changed, but didn't have time to change them," said Major Ray Braddock, of the Salvation Army.

Braddock said when Grace House became available it seemed an answer to prayers and a better alternative than the current solution of sending the homeless to Burlington, Toronto and Hamilton.

Up to 10 people will be housed on

(See 'Resident' page 5)

Steven Hawke lives on in others, thanks to organ donations

By Claudia D'Souza
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

In keeping with his generous spirit, the legacy of Steven Charles Hawke lives on through the miraculous gift of organ donation.

The 11-year-old Eastview Public School student collapsed during gym class Wed. Oct. 28th and died of a pre-existing arterio venous malformation. The non-detectable condition that caused a massive brain hemorrhage could have occurred at any time without prior warning. Despite three hours of emergency surgery at the Hospital for Sick Children, Steven's brain showed no activity.

Before he was taken off life support, his parents, Brad and Yvonne and brother Bryon, 13, made a selfless decision - they donated his organs to help others in need.

"His liver was flown to the east coast, Thursday night, and has been successfully transplanted," says his father, Brad. "His kidneys will go to two different people, two blind people will see with his corneas and his heart valves will be used for infants born with heart defects."

Although he was apprehensive about the organ donation process at first, Brad's fears dissolved knowing tremendous good has come out of every parent's ultimate tragedy - the loss of a beloved child.



Steven Hawke

(See 'Friends' page 5)

Firefighters under attack by police

Officer tells inquest he felt not enough was being done to help fire victims

By Kim Arnott
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

During the second day of a coroner's inquest into an Oakville house fire that killed four people, jurors heard two Halton police officers testify they felt firefighters weren't working fast enough to rescue residents trapped inside the home.

While admitting he wasn't a firefighter or trained in fire rescue techniques, Sgt. David Atkinson told the inquest he felt concerned about the speed with which Oakville firefighters were dealing with the August 1998 blaze.

"I just felt that things weren't happening fast enough," he said. "Things just didn't seem to progress as fast as I thought they would, bearing in mind that I knew there were people in the house."

The fire, which broke out in the early morning hours of Aug. 16, 1998, killed an Oakville mother, her two children and a visiting relative.

(See 'Inquest' page 3)



Photo by Peter C. McCusker

TUNING UP: The Village of Bronte plays host to the 2nd Annual Christmas Charity Challenge Saturday. Getting in some early practice are: (l to r) Oakville Councillor Ralph Robinson, Donna Lee-Milford of Rainbow Expressions, Susan Coyne, of the Halton Trauma Centre, and John Lam of Bronte Chinese Restaurant, with passengers Nicky Cerps and Eric Marglia. Each entrant has chosen their own charity that will receive half of the entry fee. Activities are being held throughout Bronte on the day of the event. The race takes place at 1:30 p.m.

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