

BIA goal — total revitalization within five years

There are still a number of obstacles to be overcome but Acton Business Improvement Area (BIA) president Larry Greaves expects that an ambitious downtown revitalization program should be complete within the next five years.

Greaves and other BIA brass have been optimistic about a major face lifting of the core area ever since they attended a conference in Toronto last month and learned more about various programs available from the province.

Plans for downtown revitalization were given a boost at that conference when Ontario raised the population limit for the Mainstreet Revitalization program from 30,000 to 35,000. Under the old 30,000 population guideline Acton was left out in the cold because it is part of Halton Hills, a town of over 30,000 people.

Aid criteria changed

Now that the criteria has been changed Acton's BIA, through Halton Hills, can apply for a loan through the Mainstreet Revitalization program of up to \$150,000. This loan would be repayable over a 10 year period at one per cent interest a year.

The loan can be used to do many things on public lands in the downtown which would really give the core area a brand new look, Greaves observed. The money can be used to provide more downtown parking, improvements and beautification to the street and sidewalks, put in a pedestrian mall, purchase benches, plants, shrubs, litter containers, up-

grade lighting and sidewalks, erect signs and kiosks.

Greaves noted the funds can be used for just about anything downtown "from building front to building front" and the BIA has decided a Mainstreet Revitalization loan is the direction to go.

Improved public lands will prompt landowners to improve the buildings also, Greaves suggested.

But going in that direction is easier said than done. It involves much more than just buying some benches.

Town, BIA must co-operate

In the next few years considerable co-operation between the local BIA and Halton Hills will be essential.

First off the town must adopt a minimum maintenance and occupancy bylaw.

While the province offers the town a standard minimum maintenance and occupancy bylaw to follow council hasn't moved quickly on this item. The BIA asked for the legislation some time ago.

There are problems the councillors feel with the standard Ontario bylaw. Some councillors wonder if the legislation should only cover the BIA or the entire town. Some aren't in favor of it, but Greaves feels the bylaw is crucial, not just because provincial funds aren't available without the bylaw, but also because it makes good sense. Why refurbish downtown and then let it deteriorate a few years later because some landowners won't take proper

care of their property, he asked.

Once there is a minimum maintenance and occupancy bylaw a major hurdle will be cleared.

The BIA, through the town, will then apply for the loan.

But getting funds isn't the whole answer.

Need major plan

Downtown needs a comprehensive plan, Greaves feels.

So at the same time they'll apply for a Community Planning Study Grant.

This program will fund the development of an overall plan for downtown.

The BIA wants to go after both programs at the same time so they can secure funds before the population reaches 35,000 and Acton isn't eligible again.

Development of an overall plan for downtown will be not just a tremendous help in refurbishing the core area but also help Halton Hills in the development of its Official Plan, Greaves said. An Official Plan is another criteria which must be met before provincial assistance is available, but that won't be a problem since the old Acton Official Plan remains in effect until Halton Hills unveils a new one.

Study has started

Some work for the development of an overall plan for downtown has already started, Greaves reported.

Staff from the town planning department have

been busy doing a land use and building inventory and drawing up maps.

The major study should "identify the potential and problems downtown and help us develop goals and objectives for the BIA," Greaves declared.

It will look at new development and rehabilitation of public lands downtown, examine heritage aspects, review traffic patterns, look at off street parking facilities as well as street parking, study architecture downtown, examine landscaping and streetscaping options, review the need for sidewalk furniture and walkways and building beautification.

Downtown has had studies done in the past, but never on this scale. The study is essential Greaves feels because "we must determine the cost of doing all these good things. We will be spending a lot of money and we must make it worthwhile."

Benefit whole town

This plan will be so broad in its scope Greaves believes it will benefit the entire community, not just the BIA.

Once the study has gathered all the facts and presented various alternatives for downtown revitalization the town and BIA will review it and come up with a course of action for the Mainstreet Revitalization program.

But, Greaves emphasised, it isn't a decision to be taken just by the merchants and politicians. They'll be seeking public input, since the people who will be using downtown after it is refurbished will be the re-

sidents.

It's been a long, painful job to bring downtown to this point, the brink of a major refurbishing, and there are obstacles still to be overcome, Greaves cautioned. "Nothing gets done quickly." He points the fact it has been two years since a minimum maintenance and occupancy bylaw was first discussed and a major traffic flow study is still pending as examples why things haven't happened downtown more quickly.

But Greaves says he can see the light at the end of the long tunnel to revitalization finally.

Pieces falling into place

"It's a domino situation, pieces are starting to fall into place and there will be a chain reaction. There's no reason why we can't get what we are looking for now, though it will take some more time. We don't want to rush ahead. We want to see what will serve the community best, not just today but for our children."

Greaves would like to see the major study completed and the facts and alternatives in the hands of the citizens by this time next year and then the total refurbishing completed within the next five years.

"It all hangs on council now. They must initiate things and when they do half the ball game will be won. I may be out in left field but what we propose seems reasonable. I can see no reason why we can't get what we are after."

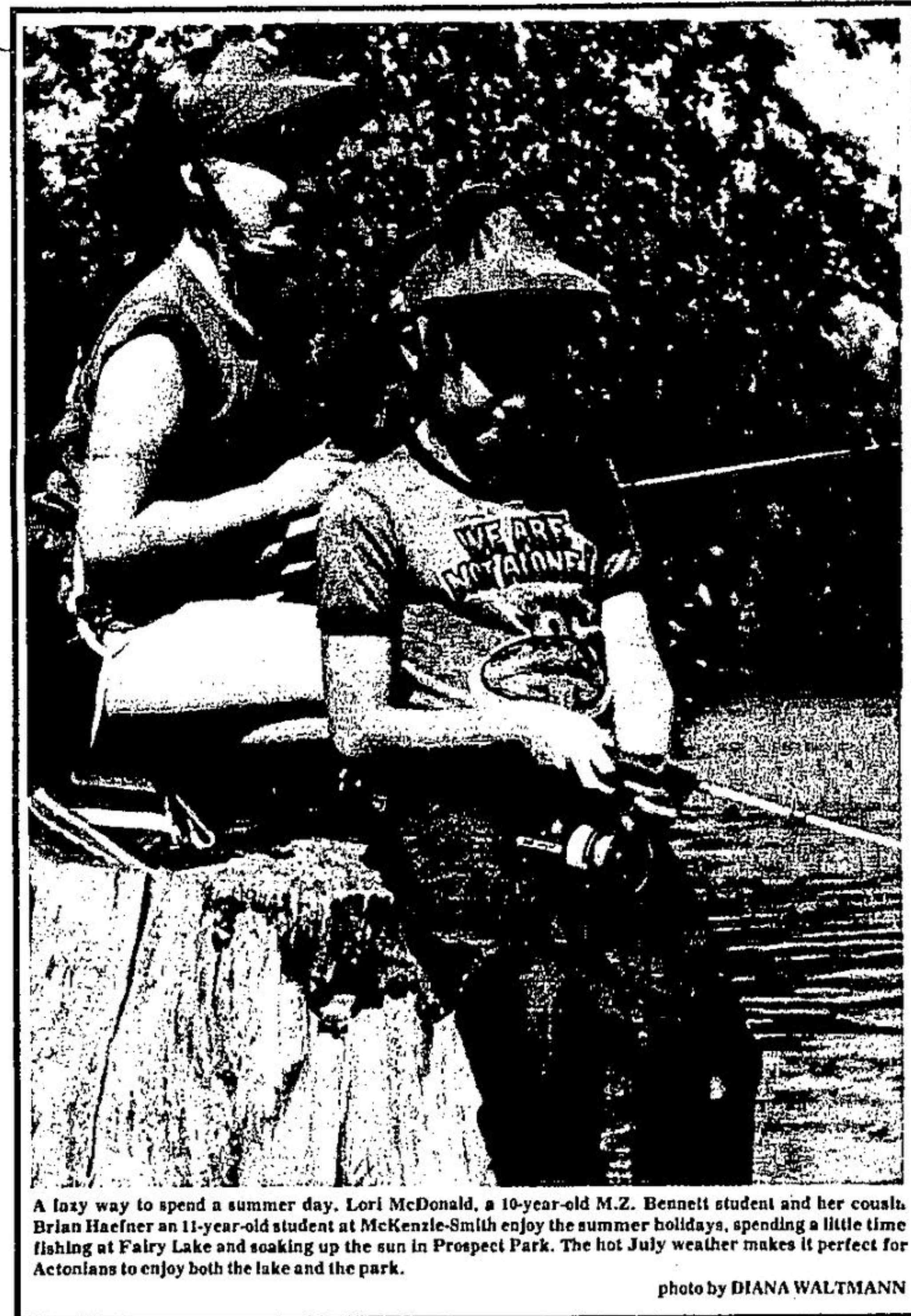
The Acton Free Press

An Inland Community Newspaper

One Hundred and Sixth Year - No. 2

ACTON, ONTARIO, WEDNESDAY, JULY 23, 1980

Eighteen Pages - Twenty Cents



A lazy way to spend a summer day. Lori McDonald, a 10-year-old M.Z. Bennett student and her cousin Brian Haefer an 11-year-old student at McKenzie-Smith enjoy the summer holidays, spending a little time fishing at Fairy Lake and soaking up the sun in Prospect Park. The hot July weather makes it perfect for Actonians to enjoy both the lake and the park.

photo by DIANA WALTMAN

Acton not top priority for new school-Reed

Parents of children at St. Joseph's School feel they were misled by Halton Separate School Board trustees when they were told repeatedly that a new school for Acton was the number one priority.

Head of the parents' association Vince Whelan said Halton-Burlington MPP Julian Reed received a letter last week from Education Minister Bette Stephenson stating money was allocated by the province for a new school in Oakville because that was the board's number one priority.

Stephenson said the separate school situation in Acton will be reviewed again in September.

Whelan reported Reed has now written to Director of Education Cliff Byrnes of the Halton Separate School Board asking why he and the St. Joseph's parents were misled.

The parents have letters from the board stating a new school in Acton was the number one priority.

The parents aren't giving up their battle though to have a new separate school built in Acton.

Petitions at St. Joseph's Church over the weekend calling for a new Catholic school were signed by over 240 parishioners. Whelan felt that was strong support considering attendance is down in the summer.

The parents' association held a meeting last night (Tuesday) to formulate plans to send a delegation to the board meeting next Tuesday night, July 29, to demand answers and action. They are hoping to have enough people in the delegation to take a bus.

Halton MP Otto Jelinek is also probing the situation and will meet with Stephenson to lobby for a new school here if necessary.

Parents are angry that the province approved funds for a new separate school in Oakville while Acton must make do with St. Joseph's, which is over 100 years old and is rented from the Halton Board of Education.

Whelan says Acton has been "shafted" and charges funds went to Oakville because it is a Tory riding and Acton lost out because it is represented in the Ontario Legislature by the Liberals.

St. Joseph's was opened in 1977 with the promise if enrolment went up a new school would be built after two years.

Three years later enrolment has climbed from 90 to 225 pupils this fall when the school enters its fourth year.

All the board has done, Whelan complains, is buy a five acre school site beside the Acton Legion for \$15,000 an acre.

Following the board meeting next week the parents are considering asking Education Minister Stephenson to visit Acton and see what the school is

like for herself. Parents are concerned about lack of proper facilities, health and fire hazards.

If the board and province don't move on building a

new school here Whelan says he is going to urge St. Joseph's parents not to send their children back in the fall and enrol them in public schools.

Nearly 1,000 receiving unemployment benefits

There are close to 1,000 people in Halton Hills receiving Unemployment Insurance benefits.

Figures supplied by Employment Canada for the month of May show 987 people with addresses in Halton Hills were receiving benefits. That figure dipped to 961 in June.

While those figures don't give an exact indication of the level of unemployment in the Acton and Georgetown areas, they do show there are many people out of work.

Employment Canada officials explain the number of people receiving unemployment benefits doesn't give the exact level of unemployment here because some receiving benefits are on short layoffs, maternity or sick leave, while others may be out of work but have exhausted their claims, been made ineligible or may not have applied for benefits.

Another gauge of unemployment, though also not completely accurate, are the number of registrants looking for jobs through the Manpower office in Georgetown, which also serves Acton.

In May 633 people were registered for work with Georgetown Manpower, but by the end of June that figure had swelled to 737. These figures don't include students.

A Canada Employment spokesman explained most people receiving unemployment insurance must register for work with Manpower. The two figures don't tally because some receiving benefits have registered with Manpower offices in Guelph, Milton and Brampton.

In addition those receiving benefits on short layoff, maternity or sick leave aren't required to register with Manpower.

Greet hero this morning

Acton greeted a hero with rousing applause at 7.35 a.m. today (Wednesday).

Downtown was jammed with residents who had waited hours to catch a glimpse of famed amputee marathon runner Terry Fox.

It was a different Fox who came into Acton—refreshed, managing a brief smile, occasional wave and a "thank-you" once in a while to well-wishers.

Although his start was nearly an hour-and-a-half later than planned, he was greeted by large numbers of fans, many of whom had been waiting since 4.30 a.m.

Fatigue had overtaken Fox two miles west of Rockwood on Tuesday afternoon, scotching any plans he had for reaching Acton that day. However, by supper time he was able to travel a further five miles through the Village of Rockwood to two miles east, at the Eden Mills turnoff. Most of the village was caught unawares as the one-legged runner fox-trotted through town at approximately 5.45 p.m.

After attending a benefit dinner in Georgetown Tuesday night given by the Cancer Society, local organizers were told Terry would be starting from his finishing spot at 5 a.m. Wednesday, getting into Acton between 6.30 and 7 a.m. A mobile sound unit broadcast the news of his Wednesday morning arrival through Acton streets Tuesday night.

Police, camera crews, Cancer Society officials, fellow runners, a cyclist and many enthusiasts waited over an hour (some nearly two hours, for Terry Fox to make an appearance.

Accompanying runners Thom Dickinson and Alex Johnston were asked not to run with Fox.

Cyclist Lorne Doherty, himself a victim of the same cancer, was asked to stay completely away from the runner. He cycled well ahead of the entourage, acting as advance guard. Doherty is president of L & L Ford (Ford is making large contributions to the cause) and is acting as a major fund raiser in Acton for the Cancer Society.



Amputee marathon runner Terry Fox is exhausted Tuesday afternoon after running from Guelph to near Rockwood. Photo by JENNIFER BARR

Died 5 days later

Woman escapes uninjured from nursing home blaze

A former Acton area resident was rescued unharmed from the tragic nursing home fire last week in Mississauga.

Vera Smethurst (nee McEachren) was one of 200

residents of the Extendedcare Inc. nursing home which was destroyed in a fire in which over 20 elderly people lost their lives.

Mrs. Smethurst was taken to the Fudger House

Nursing home in Toronto after the fire, but was then taken to Wellesley Hospital Thursday where she died Saturday night of a cerebral hemorrhage.

A spokesman for the family, Mrs. Helen Kennedy, said Mrs. Smethurst's death was unrelated to her rescue from the burning nursing home five days earlier. Mrs. Kennedy reported her sister was uninjured in the nursing home blaze and didn't suffer smoke inhalation.

Mrs. Smethurst, 61, was born and raised on a farm at RR 2 Acton.

The daughter of the late Norman and Margaret McEachren, Mrs. Smethurst moved away from here 42 years ago.

Mrs. Smethurst is survived by her husband Jack, son John of Florida, daughter Jacqueline Tooker of Uxbridge, sister Helen Kennedy of Thornhill, uncle Wilf McEachren, Acton, Angus McEachren, RR 2 Acton, and aunts Mrs. Mary McLean, RR 2 Erin, and Jenny McEachren, RR 2 Erin. Mrs. Smethurst was predeceased by her brother Douglas of Acton.

A memorial service will be held tomorrow (Thursday) in Toronto.

Sale Heller's plants close

Both of the Frank Heller and Co. Ltd. plants in Acton, which will become vacant this fall when the leather firm moves to the Disston factory, could be sold soon.

G. Alec Johnson, whose real estate firm here has listed the two Heller's Acton plants and another factory in Georgetown, said Tuesday negotiations are on with three potential buyers of the Acton factories.

He said there is "quite a bit of action" on the two local buildings.

Johnson revealed there is already one offer of purchase in for the Wallace Street plant. That buyer would turn the factory into a storage

depot. Johnson added negotiations are continuing with that potential buyer.

Another prospective buyer for the Wallace Street plant has plans to subdivide it into an industrial mall.

There are also negotiations taking place regarding purchase of the larger plant on Eastern Avenue.

Johnson said his firm is pleased to have played an important role in the purchase of Disston by a local company and expects to satisfactorily complete deals for the purchase of all three of Heller's plants.

inside

The fire destroyed mill in Eden Mills may become a private home. Story on page 2.

Acton's town hall won't just be an historical building, it will be functional. See story on page B5.

You'll find Profiles on page 2, News Digest on page 3, page 4 features editorials and columns and Rockwood Digest is on page 8.