



Stephen Owen tests out the stove at last week's open house at The Village School.



Ken Kurpiweit Jr. and Sr. conducted a Go Kart seminar at Acton Library Saturday afternoon. Here Anthony Leopardi tries out the driver's seat.



Wesley Lemstra samples cake at last week's open house at The Village School.



Four new Brownies were enrolled last week to Acton's 1st Brownie Pack. They are from left to right: Kelly MacDonald, Jodi Coleman, Bonnie Lou Morgan and Cassandra Samms.

Trustees have got to get tough on closing schools, Bruce says

School board trustees have to get "tough" about financial matters like closing schools according to Acton's representative on Halton Board of Education, Arlene Bruce.

Bruce and Director of Education Wally Beavor met with councillors Dave Whiting, Russ Miller, Ross Knechtel and Terry Grubbe to discuss education issues and the board's record budget and whopping tax hike at Friday's drop-in. Also on hand were Beavor's assistant, Bob Williams, and two taxpayers, Bill Cook and Michael Schultz.

Leading off the questioning, Cook asked when taxes were going to quit going up and up so much. He noted he and his wife have no children and anticipate having none and are disturbed by huge increase in taxes this year for education.

He claimed students he has had contact with can't write and spell properly, teachers are paid exorbitant wages, high schools are operated too informally though elementary schools are better, and the board just keeps "spending, spending, spending."

Cook said people can't afford to pay education taxes which are going to increase by well over \$100 here this year, pointing to the fact he and many others have either had to renew their mortgages at higher rates or will be in the future. He said he has talked to many other Acton citizens about education taxes lately and people wonder what trustees are doing. "Don't they stop and think" before they pass big budget increases? He noted the education tax hike this year is higher than the 1981 increase for education, region and Halton Hills combined.

He sees schools in Halton boarded up and wonders why they haven't been sold and asked why with declining enrolment the board keeps hiring more staff?

Pointing to a former Acton trustee, Bert Hinton, Cook said at least that trustee asked why the board was spending so much and urged restraint.

Cook noted the trustees debated cutting free cookies and coffee for the public, an

approximate \$5,000 expenditure, from the budget and while it was a minor cost he thought it should have been cut.

Beavor defended trustees stating they worked very hard on the budget and made many, many cuts. He said the budget and tax increase weren't treated "casually" and trustees were very "responsible in attacking" the budget. Several million dollars were trimmed from the budget.

The Halton board has a long tradition of having one of the lowest per pupil costs in the province and over the past four years tax hikes have been roughly 20 per cent annually, below the inflation rate, Beavor said.

Enrolments haven't declined to such an extent that the board can get at fixed costs very easily, yet 47 full-time teaching jobs will disappear with this budget.

Salary increases to Halton teachers haven't been unreasonable, Beavor said, when compared to wages in the public and private sectors. He pointed next door to Peel where per pupil costs are \$600 higher.

Bruce said Acton's small industrial base is responsible for the high residential tax hike here of 22.7 per cent, even higher than the Halton average. She said next door in Peel there is a lot more industry so despite higher costs taxes will only go up about 10 per cent. The high taxes was a sort of penalty for having so much open space and agricultural land in Halton.

She also complained about the province cutting grants to the board by five per cent this year, and Beavor noted if Halton had received the same grant support this year from Queen's Park the local tax increase would have been six per cent lower. Halton is penalized by the province, he explained, because there is a "perceived" assessment wealth here.

Bruce said \$9.52 of education taxes per house with the Halton average of \$7,000 assessment goes to expand the core French program and \$12.88 for special education services. Beavor said he supports expanding special education, as ordered by the province, but thinks Queen's Park should pay more of the cost.

Speaking as a parent and not a councillor, Grubbe complained about all the days students have off for teachers' professional development, time spent away from class for activities like skating and field trips to Mountsberg and the lack of emphasis on teaching basic skills like spelling. She said the concerns she was raising she hears from many, many parents.

Grubbe also didn't like the lack of programs or poor programs at local schools on days the rural buses are cancelled. She said sometimes the town students have been sent home early when the rural buses don't run and she has taken to keeping her son at home those days because it is pointless to send him to school. Both Beavor and Bruce said Grubbe should send her child to school and insist the principal provide a program. Grubbe said often the program is nothing more than sitting in the library watching films. Miller said this isn't a new problem, he's heard about it before.

Beavor said the average teacher wage is \$27,000 for 200 school days a year. Cook questioned if taxpayers and students were getting fair value for the money when days off for trips and things like skating are included in those 200 days. He said, a lot of people would like to make that kind of money for those few workdays.

Beavor said educators are always being confronted with exaggerations about problems like poor spelling and it is true there are children with difficulties but it isn't a widespread as people try to say it is. However, Bruce countered that she taught in Halton at one time and there was an era when there was "relaxed ideas" about the importance of teaching spelling, arithmetic etc. She said her own kids are "rotten spellers", but she believes the time when creativity is more important than the fundamentals is coming to an end.

Miller asked why expensive gyms have been added in recent years to some small schools and urged the board close more small rural schools like Speyside and bus students because it would be cheaper.

(Continued on page B5)

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