

VON keeps their monopoly

by Steve Arnold
Efforts by the Victorian Order of Nurses to hold onto a lucrative monopoly in Halton were rewarded with success by Regional Council last week.

Councillors voted against offering a contract to another agency to provide visiting nursing services in Burlington.

The St. Elizabeth Visiting Nurses Association of Hamilton wanted a contract with the Reg in to provide services in Burlington only.

Members of the health and social services committee had approved the proposed contract, but the administration and finance committee had rejected it.

Tom McCaughan, president of the Halton VON branch, said his group was opposed to splitting the Burlington market with another agency.

"We clearly see the addition of another agency as an unnecessary duplication," he told health and social services committee members.

McCaughan explained that the VON provides service to the entire Region at a single cost, despite the fact that actual costs to service the northern areas are higher and are in effect subsidized by Burlington residents who pay more than they would have to if the nurses were serving the city only.

"In other areas where there have been two agencies there have been problems and confusion in dealing with more than one group," he said. "When there are problems and confusion, that just has to work its way through to cost."

McCaughan added that business for the VON has fallen from last year. Some part-time staff have been cut in Halton and the agency is facing a small budget deficit for the year.

Sharon Campbell, executive director of the St. Elizabeth Association, told committee members that hers is a Catholic agency providing an

alternative to patients in Halton.

"We have a very efficient, high quality service to offer the residents of Halton," she said. "We have consistently charged less than the VON rate because we operate so efficiently."

"It is Burlington only that we are asking to service right now because we don't feel it would be in anyone's best interest to jump into all of Halton right away," she said.

The value of the Burlington market became the focal point of the debate as it continued.

Milton Councillor Brad Clements worried about the ability of the VON to effectively service north Halton if it lost income from Burlington, but Dr. Peter Cole, medical officer of health, argued that sharing that area could improve service in the north.

"Sharing Burlington could free some nurses to more effectively serve the rest of our community," he said.

The problem faced by the VON in serving north Halton, McCaughan explained, is one of density.

In Milton and Halton Hills, he explained, patients are further apart and the agency faces greater costs because the nurses have to drive a greater distance to service the same number of patients.

"If we could serve only Burlington then out costs could be lower too," he told committee members. "If this goes through then St. Elizabeth's will be making a profit at the expense of the VON."

St. Elizabeth's is a Catholic agency, although Mrs. Campbell stressed they are not under the direct control of the church and receive no financial support from it.

Dr. Cole added with the chronic home care program being started in Halton, he expected the number of people requiring visiting nurses to double in seven months.

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Rural residents anxious to hook up to Halton's water mains are welcome to try a little gamble, courtesy of Halton Region.

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Meanderings

by Mabel Barkman

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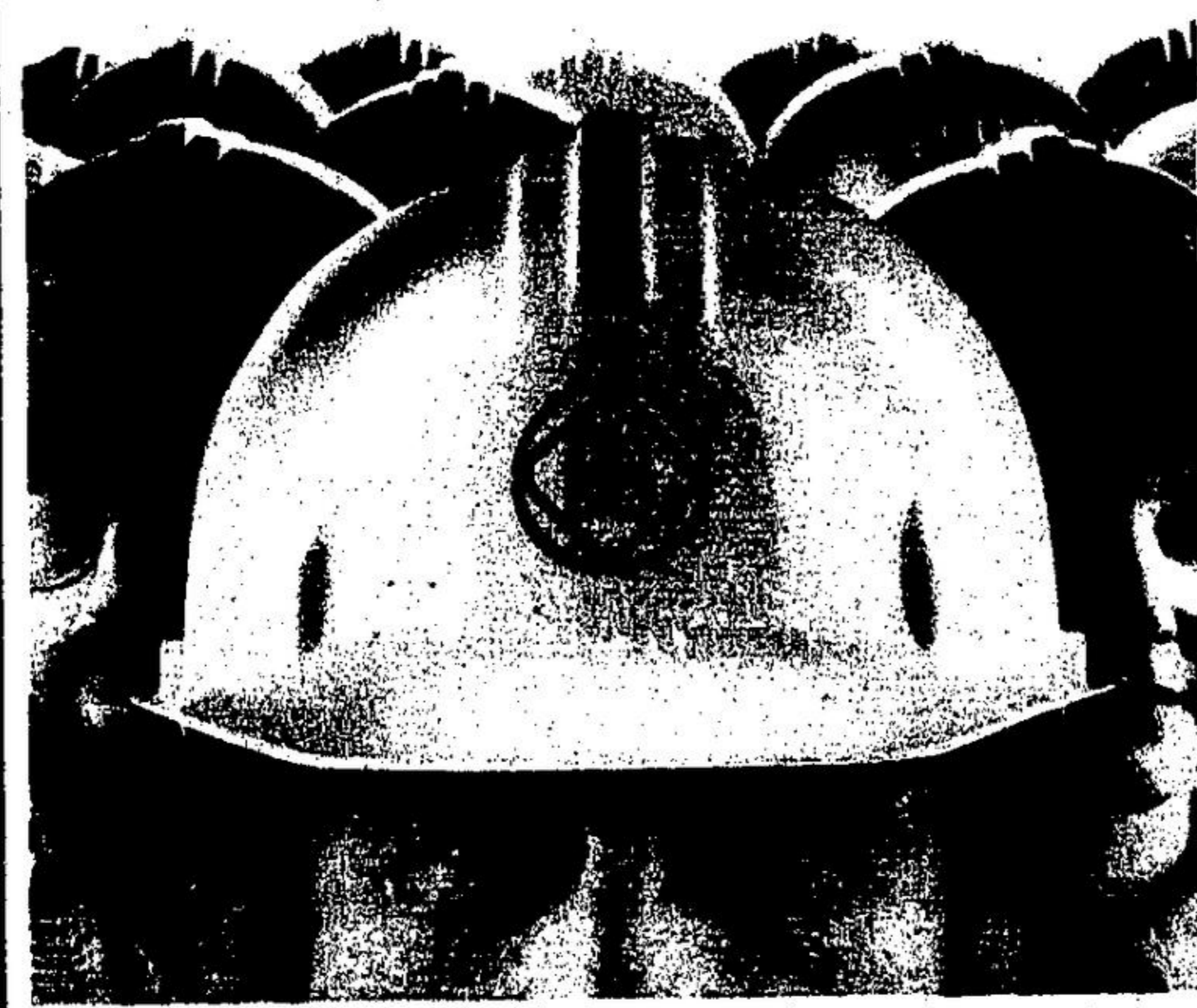
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