

It's been 30 years of 'stitching in time'

House calls are something Howard Briggs still does, after 30 years.

Mr. Briggs isn't a people doctor but a furniture doctor. It was exactly 30 years ago that he started up his upholstery business "T.H. Briggs Upholstery", in Stewarttown.

Born in Saskatchewan, the son of a prairie farmer, 63 years ago, Mr. Briggs came east with his sister. Employment was no better, even though the war had started, so, like many young men of the time, he joined the army.

It was in the army that Mr. Briggs learned the trade that would earn him his bread and butter. Called a textile refitter, Mr. Briggs learned to mend truck cushions, tarps, tents and flags.

Returning to Ontario after several years in Europe as an infantryman, Mr. Briggs had a hard time finding a job. He finally landed one at Toronto's Royal Oak Upholstery where he worked until 1951.

Married in 1947 to his wife Elda, the couple moved to Brampton, where Mr. Briggs worked until 1956 for Brampton Upholstery.

In 1953, the couple moved to Stewarttown, although Mr. Briggs continued to work in Brampton. However word got around that he was an upholsterer, and Mr. Briggs found himself repairing couches and kitchen chairs on the side.

The evening and weekend work got to be too big for the shed out back, so that an addition had to be put on it.

"When you did one, you got two and it sort of snowballed," Mr. Briggs smiled, describing how his business picked up.

In February 1956, Mr. Briggs took a chance. He quit his Brampton job

and began on his own, albeit somewhat apprehensively. "I didn't know how busy I would be and I was raising a family then," he recalled.

Thirty years have passed since then, and the young high school lad he hired to help out is still faithfully by his side today. Donny Hodge may have less hair on his head, and it may be white now, but he's a pair of hands Mr. Briggs relies on.

Mr. Briggs has other employees as well, working with him. One of them is his son-in-law Allen Bridgen, who's busy binding twine around the big round seat springs of an armchair.

Daughter Phillis works part time, and of course, Mrs. Briggs is an old hand at the business, having helped her husband right from the start, even while raising three children.

In the early sixties, S.S. No. 6, the red-brick school house on Sideroad 15 near Trafalgar Road was closed with the opening of Stewarttown Senior Public School across the road. St. John's Anglican Church bought the next door building and property.

It was an opportunity Mr. Briggs didn't overlook. The building wasn't empty for long before Mr. Briggs' Pfaff and Singer sewing machines were installed and his bolts of material put on the shelves. Mr. Briggs has been renting the 1873 building ever since.

"Whenever they take it back, I'll retire. I've had enough," the upholsterer laughed.

All kinds of furniture has passed through Mr. Briggs' hands, and even some auto work. One of the most memorable was a royal blue landau that was reupholstered for Queen Elizabeth II's Centennial visit in 1967.

"We spent a lot of time on it. Yeah, it was a challenge," Mr. Briggs said.

He pulled out a photo of an unusual rocker which consisted of two armchairs side-by-side, each facing in the opposite direction. There's always something interesting and different among the antiques that come for upholstery, Mr. Briggs noted.

From the fat coil springs, furniture has gone to flat no-sag springs and foam rubber. Today, spring-filled cushions are rare, Mr. Briggs said.

Whereas before upholstery was fairly simple, with most of the work to be done on the inside, it's now the reverse, he said.

He likes the satisfaction of a job well done and a happy customer, and although Mr. Briggs is talking about retiring in a couple of years, you can tell he'll still keep his hand in the upholstery business.



You don't often see a man behind a sewing machine, but Howard Briggs has been sitting behind one for more than 30 years. The long-time upholsterer is celebrating his 30th anniversary in business in Stewarttown. (Herald photo)



Furniture has gotten a lot lighter than it used to be and upholsterers (left) Donny Hodge and Allen Bridgen don't mind that one bit. There are no more springs or heavy wooden frames. Instead, sofas are mostly foam and often plywood in frame. (Herald photo)

Have patience, for changes will be slow in coming, says planning director

What glamorous, prosperous dreams does the future hold for Halton Hills? Right now, none.

According to Town Planning Director Ian Keith there'll be no big changes in store for Acton this year or next.

"If the water problem can't be resolved, there won't be any changes at all," he told The Herald.

So far, Halton Region is putting decommissioned wells back to work and starting up new wells, but they're all Mickey Mouse compared to the water flow the town needs in order to be able to increase its population from the current 7,000. These new sources only allow for a home here and there, or what's called "in-filling" in planning lingo.

In Acton as well, the issue of the boundary study lays dormant. Landowners previously questioning whether the growth should be west or east are laying low and the anticipated Ontario Municipal Board hearing has yet to materialize to resolve the matter. All is not bleak, however.

"I would expect in five years' time, Acton's water supply will be resolved and the East versus West OMB hearing will be resolved and we'll see some renewed activity in Acton," Mr. Keith forecast.

What about Georgetown? The Georgetown South area is probably the next major project the community will soon be noticing, the planning director said.

It was slated for substantial residential and industrial development in the Georgetown Secondary Plans approved in August 1985 by town council.

"At the present time we have little or no industrial land. At this time next year, hopefully, we will have industrial lands available for development," Mr. Keith said.

Enterac Development Corporation wants to put in new homes south of Hungry Hollow and is currently working to meet the 54 conditions set down by the town and regional governments before construction can proceed.

The residential development will open up servicing for the east side of Ninth Line along Sideroad 10 for industry, something Mr. Keith welcomes. If the water and sewer problems aren't resolved in the next year or two, these industrial lands won't be opened up and the planning director sees that as serious.

"We'll be constrained in a major way, which threatens our future stability," Mr. Keith warned. "I'm anxious to see servicing extended at the same time as the residential development goes ahead."

Right now, Georgetown has only 10 acres available for industry on Guelph Street. Any requests for more land have to be turned away, he said.

"We're losing industries to those who have the land and the (water and sewage) capacity," Mr. Keith said.

How will the new Georgetown South and West communities blend in with the rest of the town?

There's always a period of adjustment with any new growth, the town planner said. What looks new and raw initially smoothes out over time as people move in and modify the area to their needs.

"It will become part of Georgetown just as the new areas 20 years ago," Mr. Keith said pointing to the Delrex Boulevard development as an example. "It has matured into an integral part of the Georgetown community, like a fine wine."

Neighbors always have fears about new neighborhoods, but the planning director sees no reason why the Enterac homes wouldn't blend in.

As for the trend toward indoor malls, Mr. Keith said he too was aware of rumors over the past three years about the Georgetown Marketplace becoming one.

"The capacity is there to provide expansion, with lands behind and in front of the plaza, however it's up to the entrepreneur," the planning director said. He said he's had no indications from the owner that that's coming soon.

"I expect it will happen in time," Mr. Keith acknowledged. "I think we can look forward to that in the future. When and where remains to be seen."

The Secondary Plans don't allow for any major shopping centres, only for neighborhood plazas. This was to support the existing commercial outlets on Highway 7 and downtown, Mr. Keith said.

"My goals are to make those Secondary Plans go from paper into three-dimensional reality," he said. "Planning is continual process of change and evolution and we've done the best we can for the moment."

Activan rates stay at 85 cent

Activan rates aren't going up, the ActiVan Advisory Committee decided at their recent meeting at which the 1986 ActiVan budget was discussed.

The rate per trip is 85 cents, and for Halton board of education trips by students, it's \$3.40. The proposed ActiVan operating budget for 1986 is \$50,000, which is a 12 per cent increase over the 1985 cost of \$51,616.

The condition of the existing vehicle used to transport the disabled is being assessed and purchasing a new vehicle is a possibility. Over the past year, ActiVan ridership was at a high in November when 804 rides were given. It was at its lowest in July when 477 trips were taken.

During 133 hours of operation in January 1986, the van made 122 work trips, 100 education trips and 117 trips for medical purposes, and two other trips.

Donations in 1985 tallied \$13,292. So far in 1986, there have been \$250 in donations for ActiVan. The town is being asked for \$63,590 towards the service's 1986 operation. Last year, the town gave \$60,850 for ActiVan.

Authority budget at \$12 million

On Feb. 21, at the Full Authority Meeting, the Credit Valley Conservation Authority approved a 1988 budget of \$12,910,956.

The budget is broken down by program areas within the Authority

which consists of administration, water and related land management, Credit River fisheries, conservation and recreation land management, and Lake Ontario waterfront.

Made in Acton

Versatile pipe organs his pride

They make pipe organs that range in price from \$20,000 to \$1.8 million. Keates-Geissler Pipe Organs at 100 Frederick Street in Acton is one of six makers of large pipe organs in Canada.

Their pipe organs are in churches from Yarmouth, Nova Scotia to Victoria, British Columbia. You can find their work in the Christian Reform Church and the Knox Presbyterian Church in Georgetown. The First Baptist Church organ in Dallas, with a replacement value of \$1.4 million, is a Keates-Geissler Pipe Organ.

The company, once called Keates Pipe Organs, was started by an Englishman called Keates. In 1972 Dieter Geissler, an employee with Mr. Keates since 1956, bought the company.

After that, the company became Keates-Geissler Pipe Organs. When Mr. Keates started the company in 1945, it had two or three employees, Mr. Geissler said. Today Mr. Geissler employs 22 and he has no plans for expansion.

"Twenty people you can control without a manger; I like that. I would like to keep my hand in it. If it was larger, I would lose the personal contact which I enjoy," Mr. Geissler said. He describes his staff as close-knit, who show pride in their work. Some have been with the company for

40 years. Half of his employees are woodworkers and the other half are in the electronics field. Work is labor intensive. If a job is to build a new organ, half the cost will be labor and the other half materials. The company often finds that there is already an organ where they are contracted to install one, so they can use pieces from it. This reduces the costs of materials. All organs are custom built.

Of the 160 organs built since Dieter Geissler joined the company in 1956, he has no favorite one. None is more special than another. "Every organ we build is important to a particular church. Everyone we build is a certain design," Mr. Geissler said.

Mr. Geissler began his work with organs as an apprentice in Germany when he was 14. The organs demanded by North Americans are different from those demanded by Europeans, he said. And organs demanded from church to church also vary, he added.

The fact that people are more involved in their church in North America has the most to do with differences from Europe, Mr. Geissler said. In Europe, or at least in Germany, the government supports the church; they give some money to the church. Canadian churches depend solely on private support (the congregation) and consequently the congre-

gation has a bigger say in the music played, Mr. Geissler said.

"The organ reflects that. There are more people to be pleased. The denomination is also a consideration," he said.

A church that uses their organ for concerts needs a versatile one, capable of quick changes in sound. A church that has music during communion needs one capable of being played soft. If the congregation sings loud the organ must be able to match that volume. The acoustics of the church and many other things must also be considered, Mr. Geissler said.

Not all organs are for churches. It is rare, but sometimes a Keates-Geissler pipe organ will be installed in someone's home. "An oriental man from Pickering wanted one, worked for it and finally got it," Mr. Geissler said. The cost was \$20,000.

Whatever the job Mr. Geissler is always there to install the organ. "The last man on the job is in charge of quality. That's myself," Mr. Geissler said.

The company builds two to five organs a year. The market is all over North America and has recently spread beyond this continent.

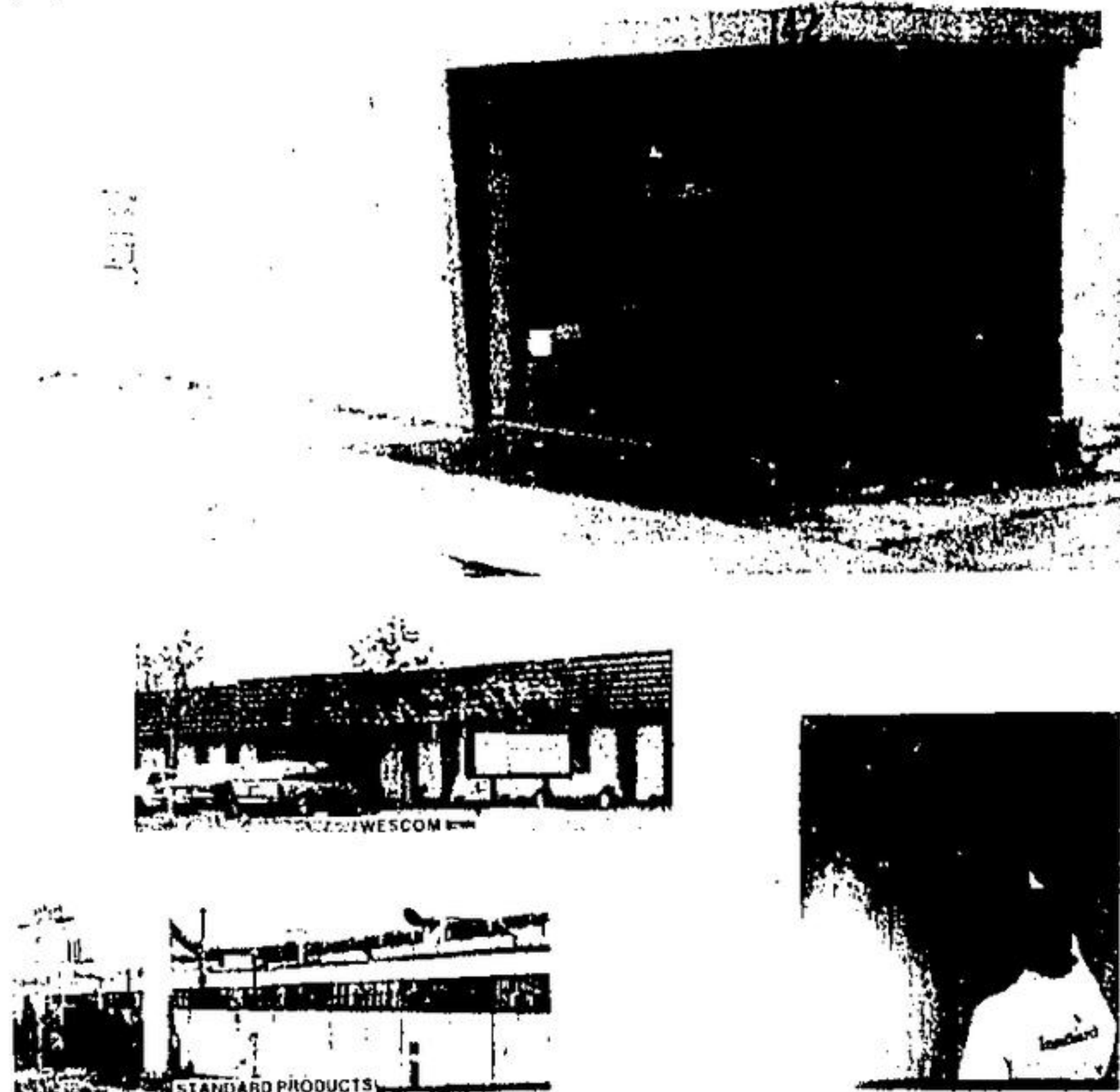
Mr. Geissler travelled to the Barbados this winter to install the first Keates-Geissler pipe organ on another continent.

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