



HEALTH CARE

Special pullout section

Donated Diet proves to be a challenge

By **LISA TALLYN**
Staff Writer

Some area residents got a taste of what it's like to rely on a food bank recently by taking The Donated Diet Challenge.

For three days Wards 1&2 Regional Councillor Clark Somerville, Halton District School Board Halton Hills Trustee Gillian Tuck Kutarna and Wellington-Halton Hills MPP Ted Arnott had to subsist on the food that came in a box similar to what a local food bank recipient would receive.

Halton Legal Services coordinated the challenge. The food was actually provided by the planning committee based on a list of items from area food banks so food wasn't diverted from their shelves.

Somerville's box included bread, instant coffee, sugar, a squash, flour, salt, cereal, canned pasta and canned pineapple.

"When I opened up the can of alphabet pasta all I could smell was sugar," said Somerville. "The pineapple was a year past its best before date."

"I found it very eye-opening," said Somerville.

While on the diet he went to a local church to pick up some fruit and vegetables provided by Food For Life, a food recovery program that provides fresh produce and baked goods throughout Halton, Hamilton and Mississauga.

He said he felt humbled walking in, but everyone there "really made me feel welcome."

Somerville said in the past he's been guilty of donating nearly out of date food to the food bank, something he won't do anymore and plans to donate some canned fruit and vegetables.

Tuck Kutarna also said she "felt humbled" by living on the diet for three days. Her box contained the ingredients for



Halton District School Board Trustee for Halton Hills Gillian Tuck Kutarna (left) and Halton Hills Regional Councillor Clark Somerville recently took part in the Donated Diet Challenge to experience what its like to rely on a food bank. Their boxes of food for three days were handed out at Halton's Leadership Summit on Poverty Reduction at Halton Region. Also taking part in the Summit was Janet Foster (centre) executive director of United Way of Halton Hills.

Submitted photo

chili— including beans, tomatoes, taco seasoning and ground beef. She made the chili and ate it over her three days on the diet. She also had some canned vegetables, tuna, cereal, powdered milk, instant coffee, a grapefruit and an orange in the box.

She said there was a huge contrast between what she had in her box, and what she eats on a regular basis.

She said the diet left her feeling bloated from all the salt, and she had a constant salt after-taste.

"I didn't go hungry but it didn't leave me feeling energetic," she said. "The longer I stayed on the diet, the more sluggish I felt."

"As a result of living on it for three days I have become a more thoughtful donor to the food bank," said Tuck Kutarna, who also found the diet isolating.

"When you live on limited portions you don't have the sense of community that comes with a mealtime," said Tuck Kutarna.

"It was certainly limiting, you would be grateful for anything to keep you from staring at an empty cupboard, but it's a long way from being the kind of diet you would hope to have to maintain your resilience and meeting the other challenges of living in poverty."

Arnott's box included cereal, canned soup, apple juice, beans, macaroni and

cheese, an egg and cheese and cracker packets.

For breakfast one day he had apple juice and cereal, followed by soup for lunch. He said he was very hungry by dinner and had canned beans he called "delicious," and an omelet he made with his egg and cheese from the packet.

He left for work hungry the next day after eating a muffin and watered down apple juice for breakfast. Lunch was Kraft dinner and canned mandarin oranges. He said by 4:30 p.m. he was feeling light-headed.

"I survived," said Arnott. "Given a choice, I wouldn't want to go through it again."

He said, unfortunately, many people don't have a choice and there are children going to bed at night and school hungry in the morning.

Susan Tupling, treasurer of Georgetown Bread Basket, said the Donated Diet Challenge was a "very effective" exercise, even though the participants weren't living like many of the food bank users.

She said the number of visits to the food bank are up since the recession of 2008. The food bank currently serves approximately 170 families and each year distributes more than 150,000 lbs. of food.

Tupling said the food bank is very fortunate right now to have a large amount of food, thanks in large part to the Scout/Guide Food Drive in November.

But she said by March there will be bare spots on their shelves.

Each month the food bank purchases more than \$3,000 worth of formula, milk and food and is very appreciative of monetary donations as they can stretch those dollars by buying in bulk and when items are on sale.

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