

# Bumpy ride ahead for those eyeing university

By JANET DUVAL

Do you know someone who's hoping to go to university in Ontario soon? Tell them to hold on — they're in for a bumpy ride.

Times are tough, and universities are facing the crunch question: do they make big sacrifices in the quality of education, or do they cut back on the number of students they admit?

York University vice-president Sheldon Levy spoke to rapt members of the University Women's Club of Georgetown earlier this month.

"My university education, and yours, was better than students get today," he said.

"We had the common room, the chair in the library, the small tutorial with the professor. Now students sit in large, impersonal classes. They rarely meet faculty members personally."

For undergrads, it feels like Grade 14, Grade 15, Grade 16 — not university, Levy said. The personal touch is gone, and with no big capital input since the boom years of the late '60s, buildings are crumbling.

Money is just part of the problem. Provincial funding has been fairly steady over the past 12 years, allowing for inflation. But demand for university educations has increased 40 per cent in the same time.

That translates to a funding drop of 25 per cent in real dollars.

Who is creating the demand? "You are!" Levy told his all-female audience. In the late 1980s, for the first time ever, the number of female students at Ontario universities surpassed the number of male students.

"That's the profound social change," Levy said.

York is now 60 per cent female. Science faculties, where female students were once a rarity, now have

## Our cash-strapped universities must cut back on either students or education quality -- UWC speaker

well over 50 per cent women. And female students are winning more than two-thirds of all scholarships in Ontario.

Georgetown High sends very respectable numbers of students to university. In 1989, 112 grads registered for Ontario universities, "and that's higher than the average for all high schools," Levy said. "It's also a 30 per cent increase since 1985 for your school."

Of the 112, 19 applied to Guelph, 14 to Western, 12 to Toronto, ten for York and lesser numbers to other universities.

Significantly, most chose a university less than an hour from home. But population projections for Halton show a 128 per cent increase in people here by 2031.

"I predict your high school's going to be a lot bigger, and your students won't get into the univer-

sities they want," Levy said. "There's just too much demand for too few spaces."

So the question remains: if Ontario isn't going to build any more universities or increase real funding, should we sacrifice service or numbers?

Universities are deciding on the latter; they simply won't cut back any more on quality, Levy said.

"The province is demanding that York and the U of T, in particular, grind through hundreds more students, but we just can't without reducing the product."

Ontario universities are already a poor third in comparison with their American counterparts, both public and private. Private institutions there receive, on average, \$22,000 per year per student in grants, tuition and endowments.

In Ontario, universities receive

\$7,200 in Provincial grants per student, \$1,500 in Federal funding, and \$1,500 in gifts and endowments. A tuition fee of about \$2,000 represents only about a fifth of the cost of each student's education.

American public universities receive double the amounts. Just as painful is the fact that Ontario government funding is the lowest in all of Canada.

Why so low? Because Ontario gives higher priority to health care, and almost all the Federal transfer payments made to the provinces go to one or the other, health or education.

"If your child is sick, don't you want the world's best health care? University education just doesn't have the same public priority. And everyone is welcome in our hospitals."

Levy argued vigorously, however, for the value of universities in society, not least of which is the much higher participation of graduates in the labor force com-

pared to groups with lower education.

One apparent solution is tuition fee increases, but that creates a problem for many students and their parents, Levy noted.

Instead, he favors Australia's Contingency Repayment scheme. Tuition there is free, but you pay for your education after graduation through the income tax system.

"It's fair," he said, "and it's something I think this (NDP) government is most likely to take seriously."

He agreed with audience members that "grade inflation" — higher marks for the same work — has occurred since departmental exams were abolished provincially in 1967.

"But no matter how you cut it, more students want to go to university than ever before, and there are more wholly deserving students than ever before."

Janet Duval is a freelance writer living in Halton Hills.

## The lessons of the Ojibway spirits

Years ago, while attending college in Sault Ste Marie, I befriended a classmate of mine — an Ojibway native named Jim Black.

Every Saturday morning during hunting season, I would head out to Jim's place north of the city to enjoy a day venturing through the backwoods. I was armed with a 12 gauge and Jim with a pocket of snare wire, years of experience, and a little magic.

At the end of each hunt, after Jim had reset his snares and I had cursed my poor marksmanship, my Ojibway friends would reach into this pocket, pull out a

single acorn, tuff the forest floor with the heel of his boot, and then plant the oak seed.

I once asked Jim about his hunting ritual — why he left the acorn behind. "Well, my father took me out into the backwoods to snare the snowshoe, he always told me to leave a gift for the spirits which helped make my hunt successful," he explained. "The acorn is left beneath the soil to ensure our future Saturday morning hunts."

I was touched by his action, but at the time my puzzled look said to Jim that I didn't quite

understand. I remember Jim just giving me one of his silly grins and then teasing me all the way back to his place about being skunked once again.

Two years later Jim and I both graduated from Sault College, but I think I left the north with more than just a diploma. I finally understood Jim Black's "responsibility" towards hunting the backwoods.

Seven years later I happened to drive up to the Sault, and while in town I visited some old college chums, one being my old hunting partner, Jim Black. For old times sake Jim and I headed to our familiar hunting grounds



### Nature's Way

By KEVIN CALLAN

on Saturday morning, me shouldering my shotgun and Jim with his pocket of snare and his gift to the spirits.

The years had altered things a little, however, for both Jim and I found it difficult to find open ground among all the young oak trees to plant our acorns, but the spirits thanked us with three snowshoe hares just the same. Yes, believe it or not I didn't get skunked.

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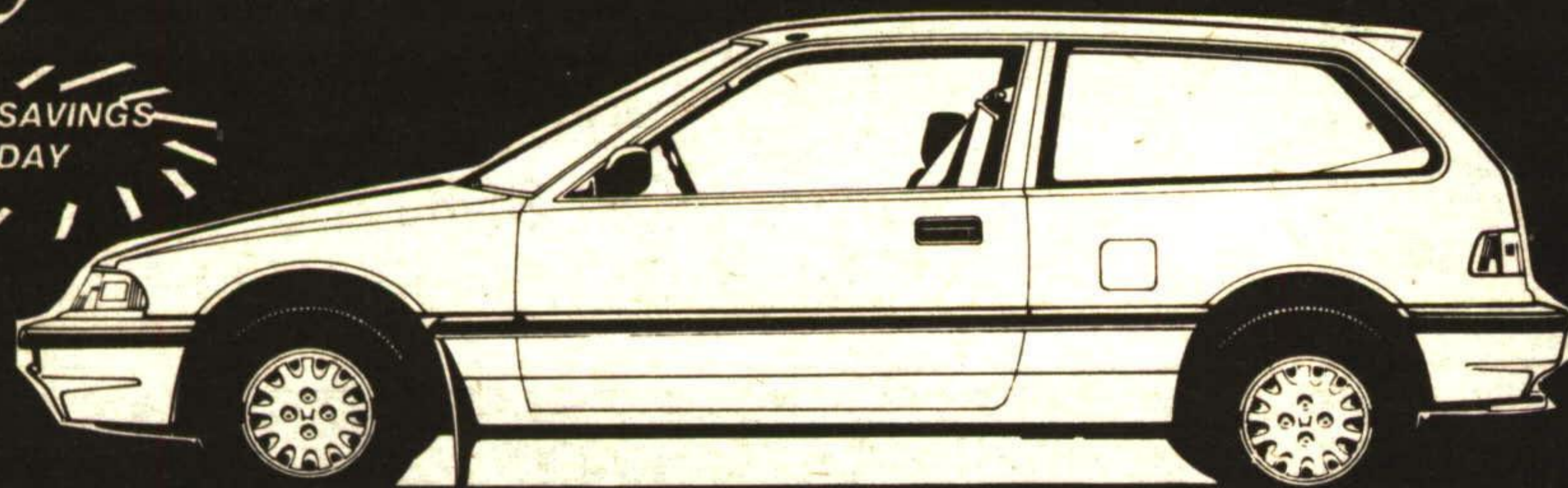
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