

'Hope cannot be crushed'

Amnesty group launched with plea for jailed Syrian women

By JANET DUVAL

An enthusiastic gathering of area residents has decided to form Canada's newest Amnesty International group.

Meeting monthly, they will write letters urging the release of prisoners of conscience — people detained around the world because of their origins or beliefs who have never used or advocated violence.

"We're using our freedom to achieve theirs," says Cheryl Broughton, unanimous choice for co-ordinator of the group.

The 15 people in attendance at Broughton's Georgetown home last week included a teenager, a grandmother, three teachers, an industrial manager, a minister and several mothers of young children.

Three reported positively on the work of Amnesty International groups they'd joined previously in other communities.

Cheryl noted that many others have expressed in the new, local group but were unable to attend the first meeting.

Area co-ordinator Wilf Ruland of Waterloo described the founding of Amnesty International 30 years ago, a testament to the power of one person, the power of the free press, and the power of the pen.

In 1961, British lawyer Peter Berenson read of two Portuguese who were arrested and jailed for drinking a toast to freedom in an outdoor cafe.

Berenson's ensuing newspaper article, "The Forgotten Prisoners," was picked up by wire services around the world. Within weeks, thousands of letters poured in to the Portuguese government, and the prisoners were released.

A new movement was born. Amnesty is now the largest human rights organization in the world, with 15,000 members and 180 groups in Canada alone. When Amnesty speaks, governments cringe.

Canada, says Ruland, will probably be cited in the next Annual Report for its actions at Oka last summer.

"Concern for the individual is at the heart of what we're doing," Ruland said. "You sit down for half an hour to write to a government official somewhere, knowing thousands of others around the world are writing the same letter."

"Governments are far more sensitive to this kind of public pressure than people realize. When you learn a few weeks later that the prisoner has been released, it's an incredible feeling."

Prisoners of conscience today include a Saudi Arabian woman arrested for teaching others to drive, a member of the Bahai faith in Iran, a communist in Central America, a black in South Africa, a Christian in Yugoslavia...

"You'll learn a lot about geography," Ruland said. The Georgetown group hopes to establish a regular meeting night at a public place that's fully accessible. One of the supporters uses a wheelchair.

The next meeting will be at the home of Linn Kingston, 45 Regan Cres., Georgetown. Everyone is welcome to attend at 7:30 p.m. on Earth Day, April 22.

At that meeting, it will be explained how to write letters to officials. Members Ron Board and Heather Ryan have volunteered to study and report on Amnesty's new campaign, "Women in the Front Lines."

The meeting will close with letter writing, the heart of the Amnesty program.

At the end of its inaugural meeting, the group signed a petition urging the release of 67 Syrian women who have been detained and possibly tortured in lieu of their husbands.

"Hope cannot be crushed," Ruland said. "Every day, somewhere in the world, another prisoner is released."

For more information about the new group, call Cheryl Broughton at 877-0331.

Janet Duval is a Halton Hills freelance writer.

New home buyers may pay higher price for education

By PAUL MITCHISON

It's either good news or bad news. It depends whether you plan to buy a brand new home, or can barely pay the property tax on the one you live in now.

Developers think the government's decision to allow school boards to charge lot levies will make the cost of buying a new house prohibitive. Education officials think it gives a break to taxpayers who shouldn't be forced to pay for new schools.

The new education tax levies have been tentatively approved in York Region, by the NDP government.

And in Halton it appears likely that once they get the chance, both local school boards will pass the legislation to charge levies, which can potentially be as high as \$10,000 per residential lot.

An average-sized high school currently costs \$20 million, while an elementary school might cost \$8 million. About one-third of the money must come from the local school board.

Financially strapped school boards see lot levies as a way out of the darkness, making the users of new schools pay for their construction.

Bill Harrison, the chair of the Halton Board of Education, looks forward to be able to charge lot levies. But the government's policy hasn't been passed down in the form of a press release, and he's still looking for more information on all the implications.

"If we're going to have a new subdivision then one component will have to be a school," he said. "Municipalities get money for roads and sewers, so it makes sense that school boards get money for new schools."

Don Schrenk, chairman of the Catholic board. "I'm still looking

as to just what this announcement read. I have absolutely nothing on this, so I'm not completely convinced that lot levies have been approved beyond the York board of education.

"It would be a real blessing for both the local school boards to have access to money for capital construction through the lot levy process," he said, adding the charges are justified.

"The growth brought by people moving to a new area generates the need for new schools and other infrastructure items. Consequently you begin to place more of the burden for those new requirements on the new people coming in."

While municipalities across Ontario worry the additional charges may hurt growth, with

the costs for land and construction materials, Schrenk doesn't think the levies will come close to \$10,000 anywhere in the Greater Toronto Area, "but then again that remains to be seen."

The development industry remains furious about extra charges to be added onto home construction.

Rob Cooper, president of the Hamilton and District Home Builders' Association, said a court battle will be waged on the unconstitutional nature of the levies.

"With a housing industry struggling under the weight of one of the worst recessions ever, the new government will kill any chance of us trying to bring lower-priced units into the market."

Car demolished

Charges are pending against an Acton man who apparently missed a curve, hit a sign and drove his car over an embankment on the Eighth Line just north of 22 Sdrd. The 1979 Mercury Cougar he was driving was demolished in the early morning accident March 15. The driver left the scene in a taxi.

Power tools taken

Lawn mowers, chain saws and a CD/radio/cassette player with a total value of \$4,840 were taken during a break-in at the Georgetown Power Clinic on Guelph St. Sometime between 7 p.m. last Wednesday and noon Friday, the premises were entered after a rear door was pried open.

Theft from auto

An overnight bag full of clothes and other items worth

Police beat

about \$50 was stolen from a car parked outside a Guelph St. tavern between 10:30 p.m. and midnight Friday. The clothes were later found at Moore Park Plaza.

Residential break-in

A residence on the Tenth Line south of 22 Sdrd. was broken into while its owner was away on vacation. The front door was kicked in and drawers in every room of the house were open but not ransacked. Police have no information yet on what was removed during the break-in, which was discovered March 21.

Georgetown



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