

Erin man helps turn hoax into help for disabled

By WENDY LONG

Special to Halton Hills Weekend

Pop can tabs mean a lot of Erin resident Alan Alexander, a proud Korean war veteran and WWII veteran. And he'd like them to mean something lots of other people too.

Alexander has taken on the responsibility of promoting pop tab collection. The reason is simple: the end results mean supplying wheelchairs to the disabled.

It initially began as a hoax three or four years ago. Although no one

is exactly sure where it began or why, rumors circulated that saved pop can tabs would provide dialysis machines and other wonderful things for the ill and less fortunate.

It seemed that people everywhere in Canada and the United States had a worthwhile, or so they thought, mission. Save those metal tabs. But when the time came to turn them in and make things happen, no one knew where to send them or who to call.

"It turned out to be a hoax," said Alexander, who himself is unsure of

what happened.

Two Elora men refused to let a good idea die. In an innovative measure, a successful program was started by Jack Baumber and Ray Pearse, employees of the Royal Canadian Legion in Elora.

"Everyone was talking about it, it was even in the papers at the time," said Baumber about the original hoax in a telephone interview. The Elora Legion was collecting the tabs too. "We thought it was real. We thought we'd be supplying wheelchairs."

Needless to say, there was no place for the tabs to go. "They were all in my barn," said Baumber. "Rather than dump them we decided to see if a metal scrap yard in Guelph would take them. They did. We decided to keep going and see what happened. It really mushroomed."

The first real-life wheelchair was provided in 1989, thanks to Baumber and Pearse and the people who collected pop can tabs. They are now on their 14th wheelchair.

The tabs bring in from 22 cents per pound to 38 cents per pound, depending on the market, said Baumber.

At the very time Baumber was being interviewed on the phone, Ray Pearse was busy lugging pop can tabs to the metal scrap yard. "He just took 800 or 900 pounds over," said Baumber, adding that two weeks previously they had turned in another thousand pounds of pop can tabs.

Baumber said the metal tabs are being collected by the Girl Guides, Air Canada, and the TTC. He encourages everyone to get involved. "There are three or four drop-off centres in Toronto," said Baumber. Direct drop-offs at the Elora Legion are also welcome.

"We provided a girl in Fergus who had spina bifida with a wheelchair," said Baumber. "Now she's the head of collecting them (tabs) at her school."

Schools, institutions, businesses,



Korean War veteran Alan Alexander of Erin is volunteering to pick up your collected pop can tabs within the area. The tabs will then go to the Elora Legion to purchase wheelchairs for the disabled.

industries, everyone can help by saving the pop can tabs.

The money obtained from the tabs by the Elora Legion goes directly towards the purchase of second hand wheelchairs. "They have to be in good condition," said Baumber. He explained that many people and organizations are aware of the Elora Legion program now, and they will often let the Legion know of wheelchairs that are for sale.

Baumber cited an example of a chair they just purchased for \$800 from a private citizen who paid \$2,600 for it. The chair is six weeks old.

The main problem in the pop can tab project now is the collection and delivery to the Elora Legion from other communities.

This is where Alan Alexander and the Korean War Veterans, Unit 13, fit in. Alexander is a tireless volunteer, retired, who thinks turning pop can tabs into wheelchairs is great. He's willing to collect Erin's tabs and take the drop-offs to the Elora Legion.

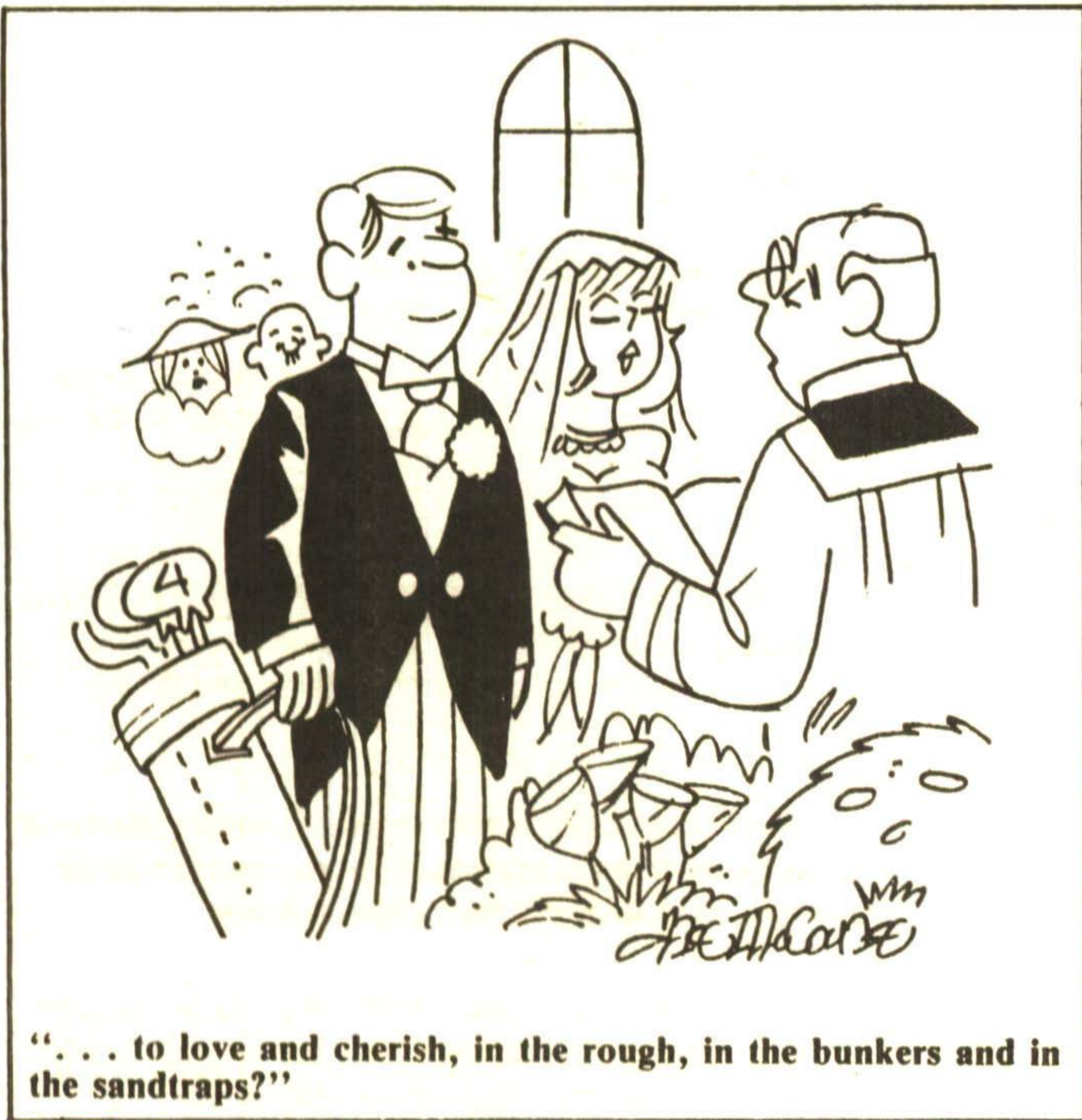
He himself got involved in collecting the tabs through his handicapped son, Bruce, who began collecting tabs for a deaf girl who was gathering them for her church. One day when Bruce went with his father to the Korean Vets meeting, he picked the interest of the K-V-ETTE ladies.

Alexander said several Erin businesses and schools are coming forth to join in the tab effort. He encourages more to do so. "It's also good for the environment," said Alexander.

When Alexander, a youthful 71 with a sparkle in his eye, is not crusading for pop can tabs you can find him volunteering with the disabled at Sunrise Equestrian.

"When you help other people it makes you feel good inside," said Alexander.

For pop can tab pick up or to drop off your collected tabs within the area, contact Alexander at 519-833-2836. For more information, contact Jack Baumber or Ray Pearse at the Elora Legion, 846-9611 or 110 Metcalfe St., Elora, Ont., N0B 1S0.



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