

School board cushions tax blow

By ANGELA BLACKBURN
Special to the Independent/Free Press

After getting \$1 million more in grants than expected from the Ministry of Education, Halton Board of Education trustees voted unanimously to use the cash to cushion the tax blow for taxpayers.

At the March 22 finance committee meeting, trustees approved a 2 per cent expenditure budget increase for a \$291.3 million 1993 budget. Trustees formally approved this budget at Thursday's board meeting.

It translates to a 3.4 per cent increase or \$43 more on the average tax bill when the budget is factored together with provincial grant revenues.

The grants came in \$3.7 million short over 1992 instead of the \$4.7 million shortfall expected under provisional grant formulas announced earlier this year. It means 21.5 per cent of the board's budget comes from the province while 78.5 per cent is raised through local property taxes.

The \$1 million, applied directly to the mill rate increase, brings the mill rate increase to 3.4 per cent or \$43 on the average tax bill instead of the 4.01 per cent increase or \$50 on the tax bill that's actually reflective of the 2 per cent expenditure budget increase.

In what's been billed the toughest budget year ever, it all left education director Bob Williams still struggling to find another \$500,000.

When trustees demanded administration come up with a 2 per cent expenditure budget increase, cuts were made across the board and still there was a shortfall of \$1.2 million.

So Williams went out to board employees and asked them to donate the equivalent of a day's pay each to the board, to raise the money.

After much controversy among employees about the request, Williams announced March 22 that approximately half of the board's 4,000 full-time equivalent staff had responded and approximately half, \$500,000, of the money has been raised.

The deadline for contributions from staff has been extended to March 31 and Williams said he remains hopeful staff will cooperate.

The director has said the \$1.2 million could be raised through the contribution scheme or approximately 75 layoffs. Layoffs to pick up

the remaining \$500,000 could still be in order.

"We're looking for another \$500,000 and potentially there could be some layoffs or severance agreements," said Williams, although the director said it could be an "ethical issue" for him to have to lay off staff in light of receiving the unexpected \$1 million in provincial grant revenues.

On the number of staff contributions made thus far, Williams said, "I guess I've got to say I'm pleased with the result. It shows a clear understanding of a significant number of staff of our financial situation," said Williams, noting no information is being collected about who is contributing and who isn't.

The Halton Chapter of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) put up some stiff opposition to the scheme.

"We're sending a letter out to staff, thanking them and reiterating the need. We've been asked by a number of staff to give them more time," said Williams.

The board also got news March 22 that it will receive a \$1.4 million one-time grant for the purpose of restructuring.

For their part, trustees looked at 10 trustee-proposed amendments to cut the budget. All but one were rejected by trustees.

The elected officials did agree to cut the publication of the board's Our Schools magazine to save

approximately \$20,000. That adjustment however affected the mill rate only a small fraction of a percentage point.

Among items not cut from the budget:

- On saving \$185,000 by cutting a temporary assistance account for clerical workers by 50 per cent, Halton Hills trustee Dave Whiting said it showed misunderstanding to think clerical work doesn't affect students directly.

- A suggestion to have only trustees who live north of Britannia Road claim mileage was called discriminatory by some trustees while another noted that while trustee honorariums haven't increased in two years, one-third of it is tax free.

EVERY BUNNY LOVES OUR Easter Brunch

SUNDAY, APRIL 11, 1993 10:30-2 p.m.

Easter Brunch in the country by a crackling fireplace at the
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Menu

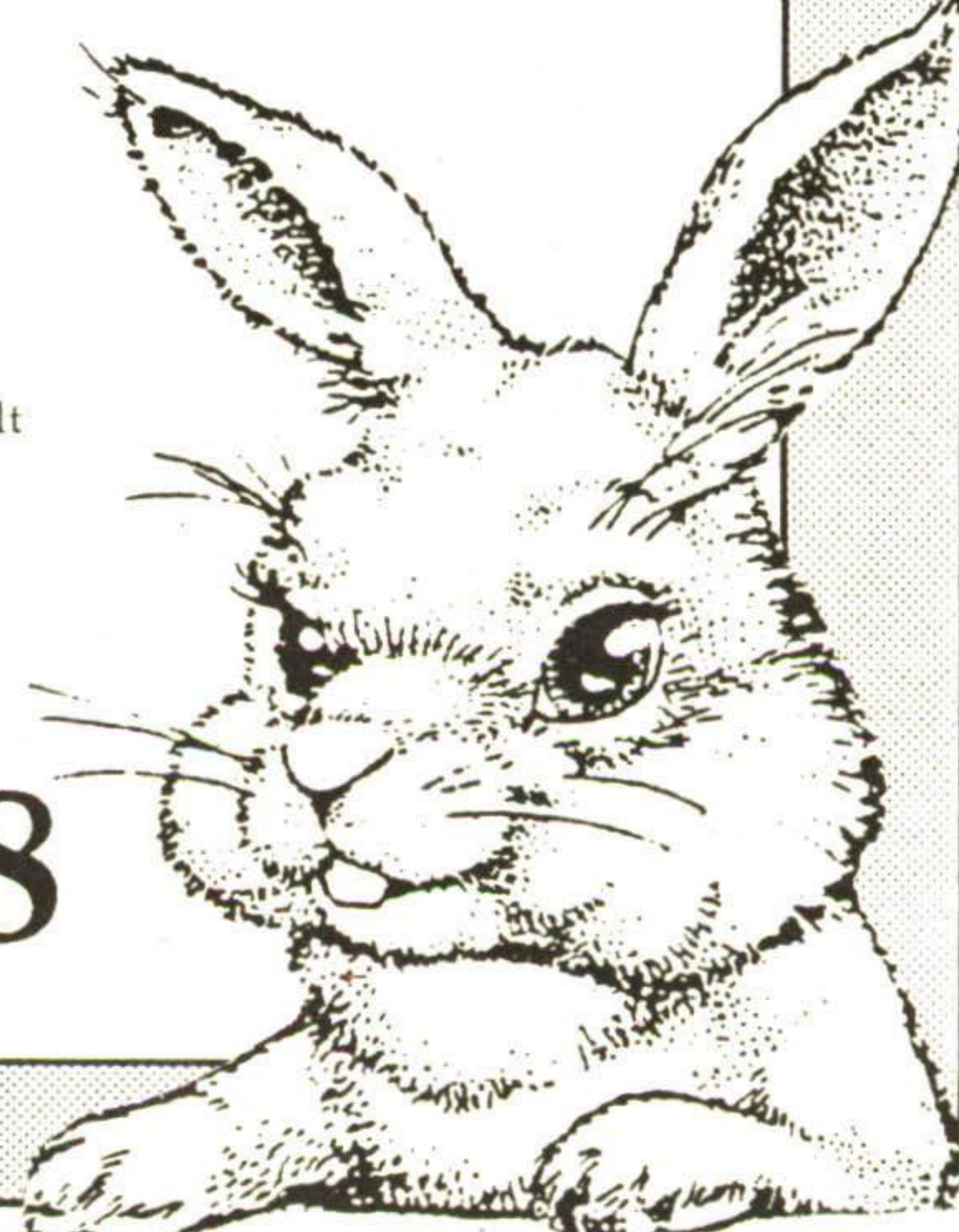
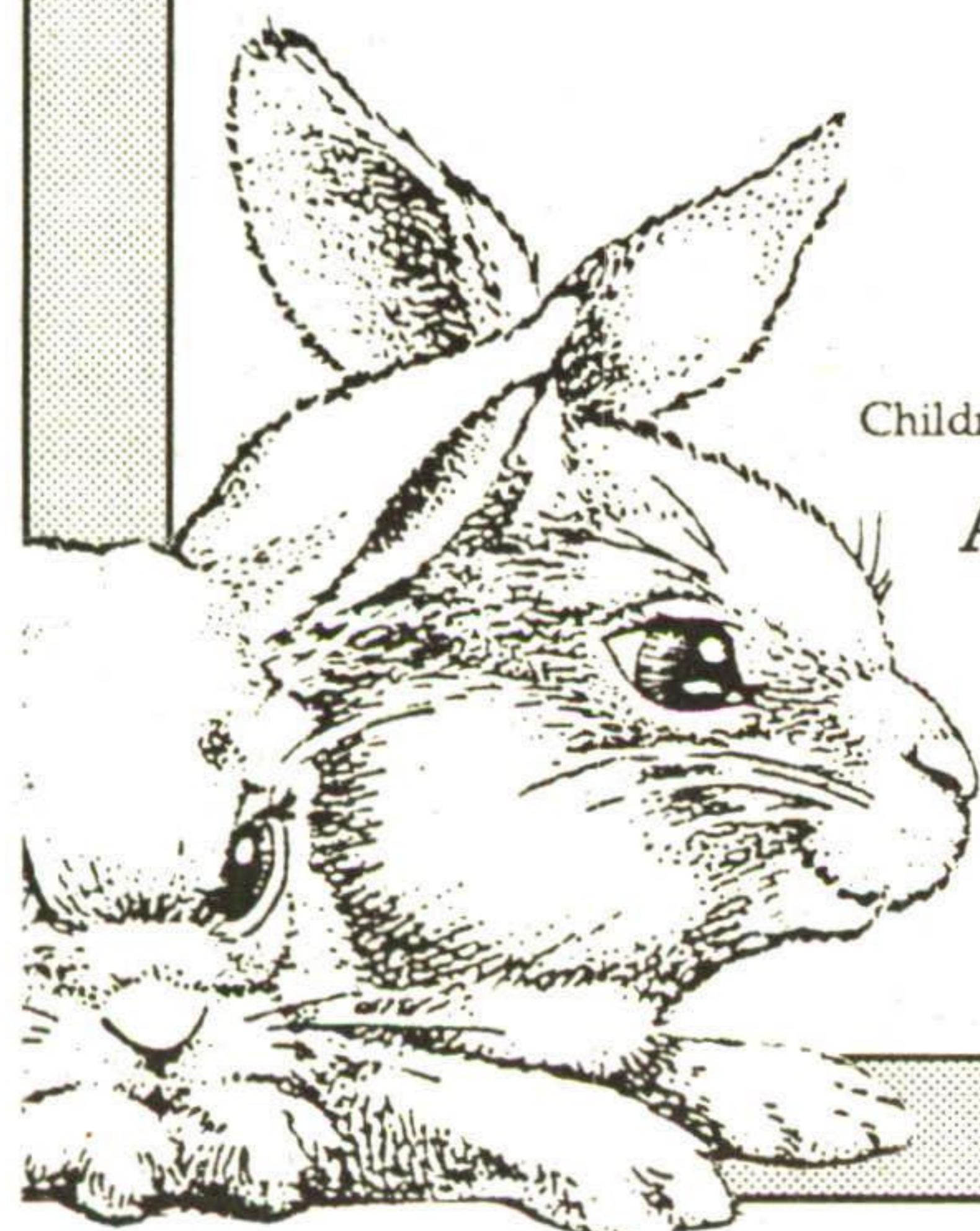
Honey glazed ham, roasted turkey, roast beef a jus, shrimp, salads, lasagna, bacon & eggs, crepes, French toast, fruit salad, fresh baked goods, tempting cakes and pastries, coffee, tea, juice and more.

\$9.50
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WHOPPER*

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Whopper* FREE!

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before ordering. Not valid
with any other offer.
No cash value. Applicable
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WEEK 2

APR. 5th to APR. 11th

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WEEK 3

APR. 12th to APR. 18th

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at the regular price
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WEEK 4

APR. 19th to APR. 30th

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