

Everyday heroes

Jim Dills

BY DONNA DANIELLI
THE COMPASS

Looking at the honours accorded to Jim Dills over the years and the number of ways he has kept an active profile as a volunteer, one thing remains perfectly clear. The recent Lifetime Achievement award bestowed on him by the Milton Chamber of Commerce was greatly deserved, even if he's not so sure about that.

When asked how he felt, he admitted that it was "certainly a great honour," but added that "...there are many others who have done as much, if not more and there are many who have made possible what I've done." Modest words from a man who lives by a motto of, "If it is to be, it is up to me."

Born and raised in Acton, Mr. Dills became involved in the newspaper business when his father, George A. Dills purchased *The Acton Free Press* and *The Canadian Champion*.

"I had worked in the paper from the time I was 12 years old on weekends and after school. You must remember that we're talking about wartime years when there were not a lot of young people available for staff work. So I began typesetting headlines for the paper after school."

He laughs when he talks about one of his jobs, cleaning the press or as he called it, "the great mighty monster that was housed in the corner and ground away." Preferring the cleanliness of the office, he quickly turned to writing. In 1951 he graduated from the first 'Graphic Arts, Management and Journalism' class at Ryerson Institute of Technology, winning a silver medal from the college for general proficiency. Along with his father and brother David, he created Dills Printing and Publishing Company and worked with *The Canadian Champion* and *The Acton Free Press* until 1978 when it was sold to Inland, which was then purchased by Metroland. In 1943, when his father purchased *The Canadian Champion*, printing a newspaper was completely different than it is today.

Mr. Dills learned to hand set type, a skill that would be in danger of fading into obscurity if not for MacKenzie Heritage Printery in Queenston, Ontario. Dills is Vice Chair of the museum's Board of Directors, which is the largest operating printing museum in Canada and dedicated to the preservation of the Gutenberg style of printing.

When the Dills family sold the newspapers in 1978, he moved on to become the Executive Director of the Canadian Community Newspapers Association. The Association had over 600 member papers and it was Mr. Dills responsibility to represent them

in Ottawa and deal with postal officials, raise the profile of community newspapers and sponsor research and development. The job took him across the country for the next eight years, meeting many new people and gathering new perspectives.

"I found that I always wanted to meet the people who produced newspapers," he says, "because representing the industry to Ottawa officials was very difficult... The stories that I picked up in meetings with publishers across the country were the things that helped me illustrate to the bureaucracy what it means to be in a community, not only the pressures but also the acceptance and the need the local community had for its communication."

Mr. Dills eventually decided that he'd had enough traveling and retired from his job in 1987, only to begin a new role as historian, publisher and author. In 1991, he established County Chronicles Press for the purpose of publishing historical books and material. In 1993, he published *Moments In History, Reflections of Halton's County Town 1833 - 1864*.

"I enjoy history and I enjoy discovering and retelling the tales so that people can appreciate the traditions and background of the community and area," he comments.

When he speaks about his book, he says that, "It was a joy to me to write the text, research it and bring it into print in a practical and presentable form." Mr. Dills hopes to eventually publish another volume, covering the period up to the 1900's.

"Milton changed quite dramatically in that time period. We go all the way from the Fenian attacks on Canada's border and volunteers leaving from this area in 1865, up to 1900, when electric lights and water supply was installed, and the town's population was changing. Robertson Manufacturing was really the first manufacturing company of any sig-

nificance (established in 1908). It was a period of great change."

That next book may still be some time coming. Mr. Dills is incredibly active as the Director of Research for the Milton Historical Society, on the Communications Committee for St. Paul's United Church, a member of the Board of Directors of Milton Evergreen Cemetery Co., as well as being a patron of Milton Millennium Community Residences. In the past his awards have included a Jubilee Medal on the 25th anniversary of the accession of Her Majesty the Queen to the Throne in 1977, named Milton's Citizen of the Year, also in 1987, a shared President's Award from the Ontario Community Newspapers Association with his wife Shirley in 1982, a Commemorative Medal for the 125th Anniversary of The Confederation of Canada for "significant contribution to compatriots, community and to Canada" in 1993, and the Achievement Award by the Ontario Heritage Foundation in their Community Heritage Recognition Program in 1996. This year's Lifetime Achievement award was certainly well deserved.

Mr. Dills married his wife Shirley, a porcelain artist, in 1952. Shirley, he says, "has always been supportive and done all of those marvellous things that help me look good." The family moved from Acton to Milton in 1954 and have remained in the same house where their five children now bring eight grandchildren and two great grandchildren to visit.

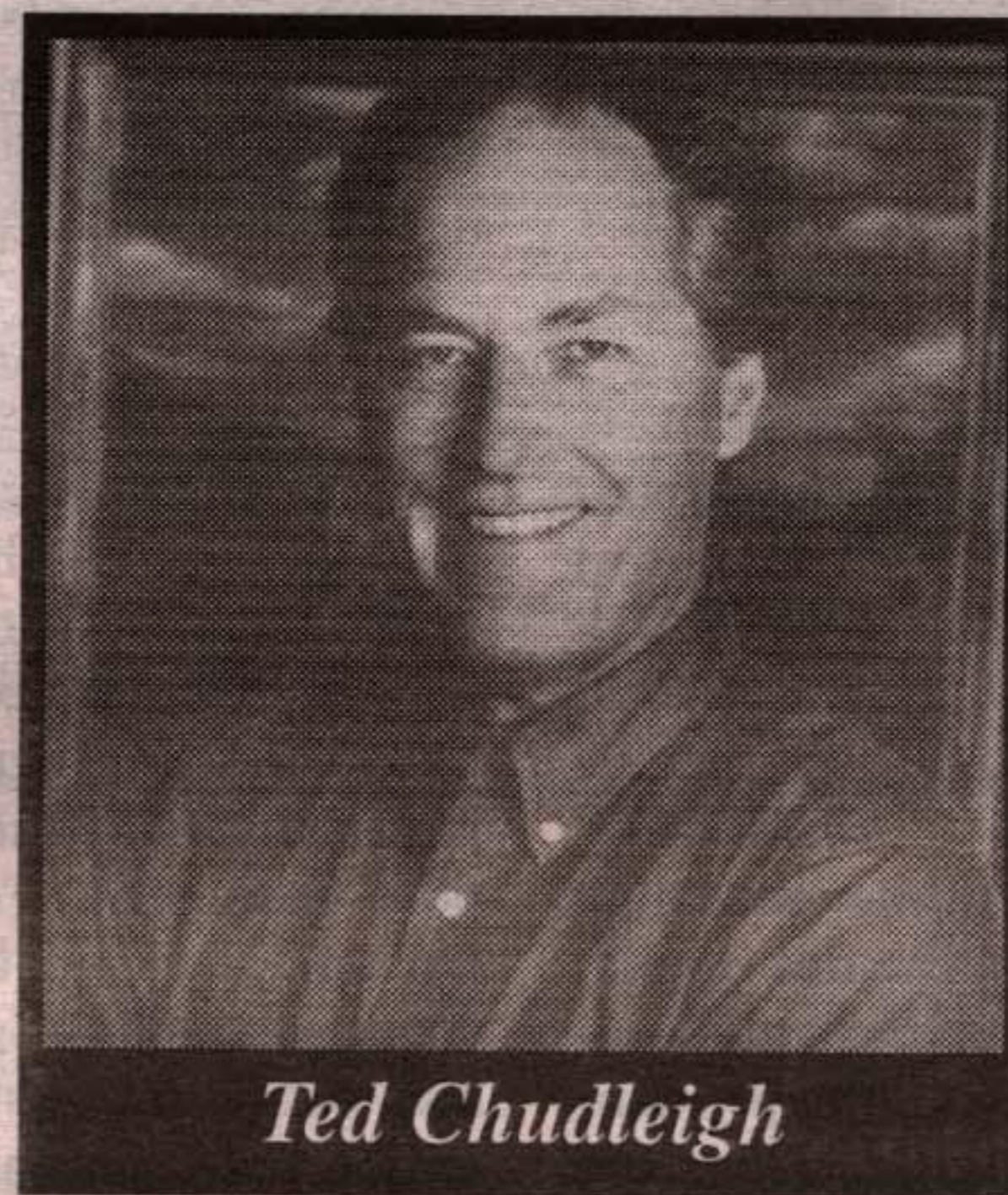
When speaking of Milton, Mr. Dills said, "It's a great town because it gives people an opportunity to participate and to be involved... There are great opportunities to meet other people and all aspects of life are possible here." He's right, Milton is a wonderful place to live, mostly because of people like Jim Dills, people who make their community shine a little brighter by being a part of it.



PHOTO BY DONNA DANIELLI

Recent recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Milton Chamber of Commerce is Jim Dills, right, and wife Shirley.

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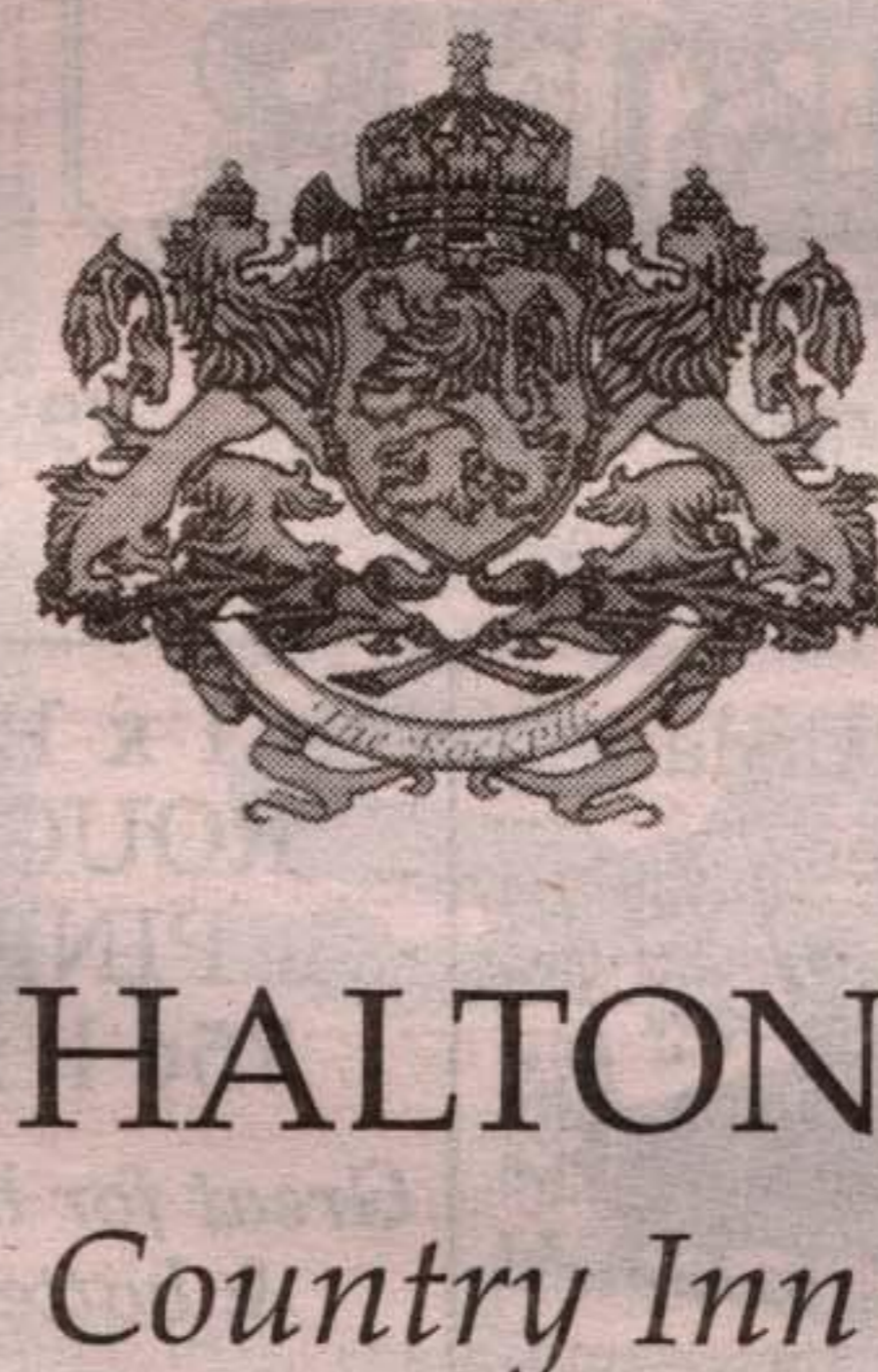
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