

Publishers, editors, reporters not advised to seek or hold political office

by Deborah Quaille

Publishers, editors and reporters actively engaged in the operation of a newspaper should not seek or hold political office in its circulation area, the Ontario Press Council commented in upholding a complaint against the Fergus-based weekly The Wellington Advertiser. The opinion, reiterating a ruling made in 1985, arose from adjudication of a complaint by Teresa Gibson Smye, a Rockwood business owner and unsuccessful candidate in the 2000 Mayoralty election in Guelph-Eramosa Township.

She maintained there was a conflict of interest in the fact that the candidate who defeated her, David Adsett, is also editor of The Wellington Advertiser.

Mrs. Smye's complaint focused on an article published in his paper November 10, 2000, which contained Mr. Adsett's replies to five questions posed to mayoral candidates and included a sentence that said simply, "Candidate Teresa Gibson Smye refused to participate."

She said the article should have included her reasons for declining to answer the questions, contained in a letter to the editor sent October 30. It said she declined to respond to questions in The Advertiser because she believed "A definite conflict of interest not only exists but is readi-

ly apparent between your political office and your editorial position at the paper." The letter added:

"This not only relates to what news is reported but how and when it is reported, if at all. I also do not believe we are operating on a level playing field here, considering I will not have access to your responses prior to publication, while you have the opportunity to review all responses from all candidates."

Mr. Adsett, whose father (a former reeve) owns the newspaper, cited a 1997 editorial written before he took office as reeve of Eramosa Township. In that column he said that in his three previous years as deputy reeve he had not written an opinion article or edited any news reports dealing with council activities.

"That was my promise to residents when I first sought a council seat. With my new position, that same promise is now passed on to residents in Wellington County."

The Advertiser's reply to the complainant said that guidelines in effect since 1996, when the paper began expanding coverage of municipal councils in its area, provided that the reporter covering council would have absolute autonomy in deciding what issues to write about. The reporter and copy editor would determine the final shape and form of the article, the headline and where the story would

be placed.

"In no case was Dave Adsett to be told what was being covered, or how. He would not see any news articles until they were completely finished and placed in the newspaper... Further, all editorial comment about any local issues from any municipality in Wellington would be handled by the newsroom staff."

The Press Council conceded that Mr. Adsett appeared to have made an honest effort to avoid creating grounds for charges of bias but added that it believed the potential for a perception of unfairness remained.

The Council took account of the 1985 hearing involving another weekly newspaper editor serving on the board of education who wrote editorials commenting on teachers' strike. The text of that adjudication said:

"The Council believes that a person participating in public events cannot deal fairly and objectively with news and comment about them; and it is improper for a newspaper publisher, editor or reporter to assume the dual roles of both actor and critic by holding office in any public or private body likely to be in the news."

Mrs. Smye commented, "I'm pleased at the outcome, and I think it's unfortunate that Mr. Adsett has found the truth so elusive."

Milton Council Briefs

by Cindy Pearson Lunau

ROAD REPAIRS: As the saying goes, there are two seasons in Ontario - winter and construction. These are some of the projects currently in the works:

GUELPH LINE - The landscaping project is nearly complete. Jimmy's Petro Canada Gas Bar should re-open any day now. **20 SIDE ROAD** - The Region has commenced resurfacing of 20th Side Road from First Line Nassagaweya to the Guelph Line. The project will be completed by mid-August. **FIRST LINE NASSAGAWEYA & 17 SIDEROAD** - This intersection will be closed for knoll reduction and intersection improvements between August 20 and September 14. Local traffic & emergency vehicles will access First Line home from 15th or 20th Sideroad.

FIRST LINE STUDY: An Open House to present options for improvements to McNiven Road between Steeles Avenue and Campbellville Road will be held on Thursday, August 9, 6-9 p.m. at the Lions Hall in Campbellville.

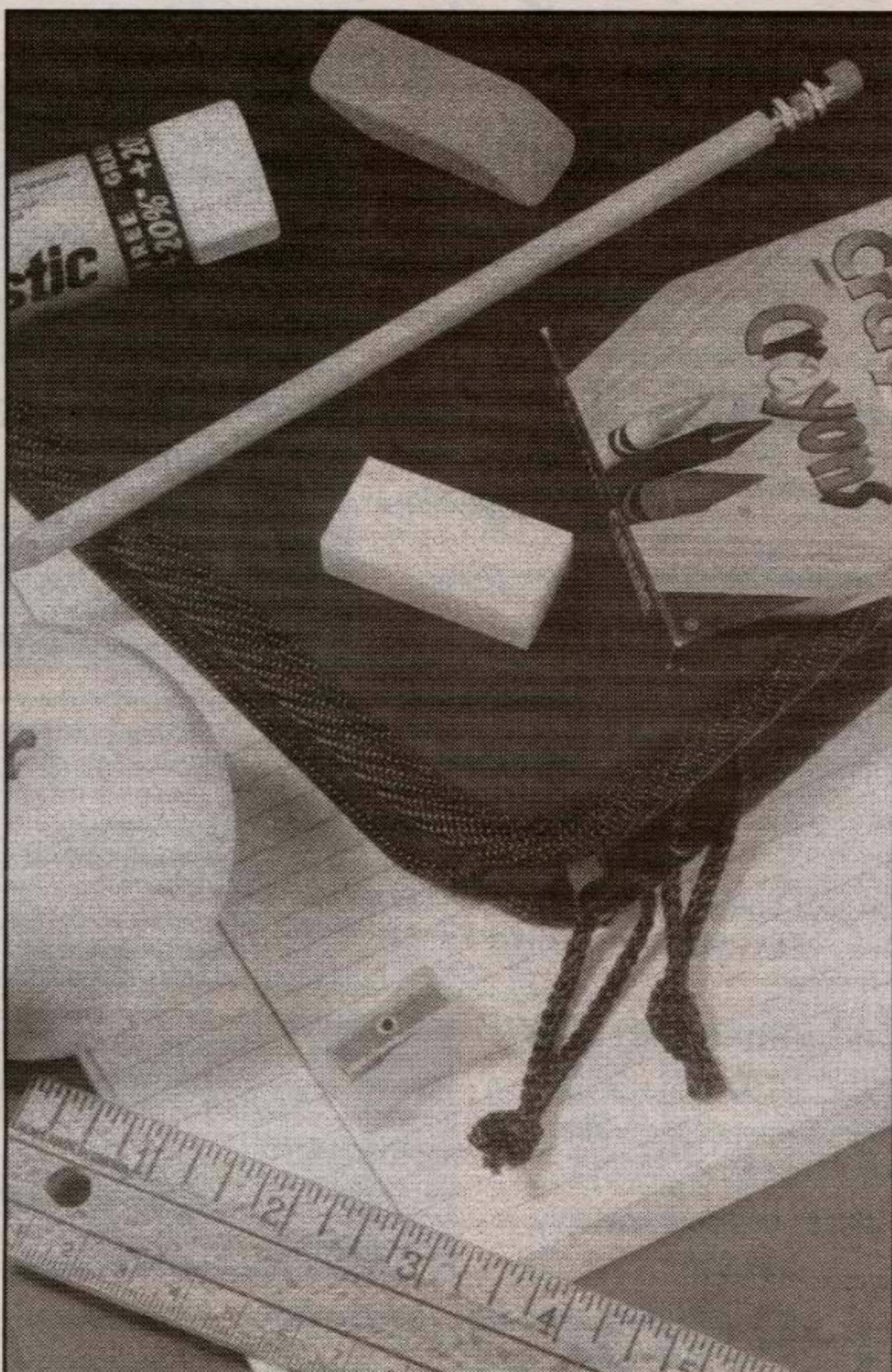
TAR & CHIP: Under the Rural Road Maintenance program, tar and chip must be added to roads on a regular schedule to maintain the integrity of the surface. This should be done every five years, even if the road appears to be in reasonable shape. Unfortunately, it does create dust for a few days. The Town tries to give notice to residents who may be affected, but this year's notice was less than ideal. The program is now completed for this year, but I've made a note to include the schedule in next year's Council Notes well in advance of the application.

NEW MAGNA PLANT: After months of speculation, the site of the new Magna Plant is now known. Modatek Systems, owned

by a subsidiary of Magna International, has filed a site plan and applied for a Building Permit to construct a facility on 76 acres in the industrial area of Milton, south of Highway 401 and west of Regional Road 25. The 450,000 square foot facility will employ approximately 600 people to manufacture and assemble truck frames and chassis for Daimler Chrysler and General Motors. Construction will begin in early August 2001 to permit the plant to be operational by 2002. The chosen site was already owned by Magna and adjacent to another Magna operation. **GROUP HOME:** Council has determined that a proposed Group Home on Victoria Street, Milton, is not in compliance with current by-laws, since a present residence is operating as a group home within the 300 meters designated under the current by-law. Council has also requested the establishment of a registry for all residences currently operating as group homes, and requested a policy that requires a public review of any applications in the future.

LIONS CLUB DONATION: On behalf of the Town and the Fire Department, we would like to thank the Campbellville & District Lions Club for their donation towards the building of the new Firehall in Campbellville. These funds will be used to enhance the facility for the benefit of our dedicated volunteer firefighters. Further, we wish to thank the Lions organization for 29 years of service to our community. We are saddened by the closure of the Club, but know that each member will continue to contribute to the community in their individual ways.

Continued on page 8



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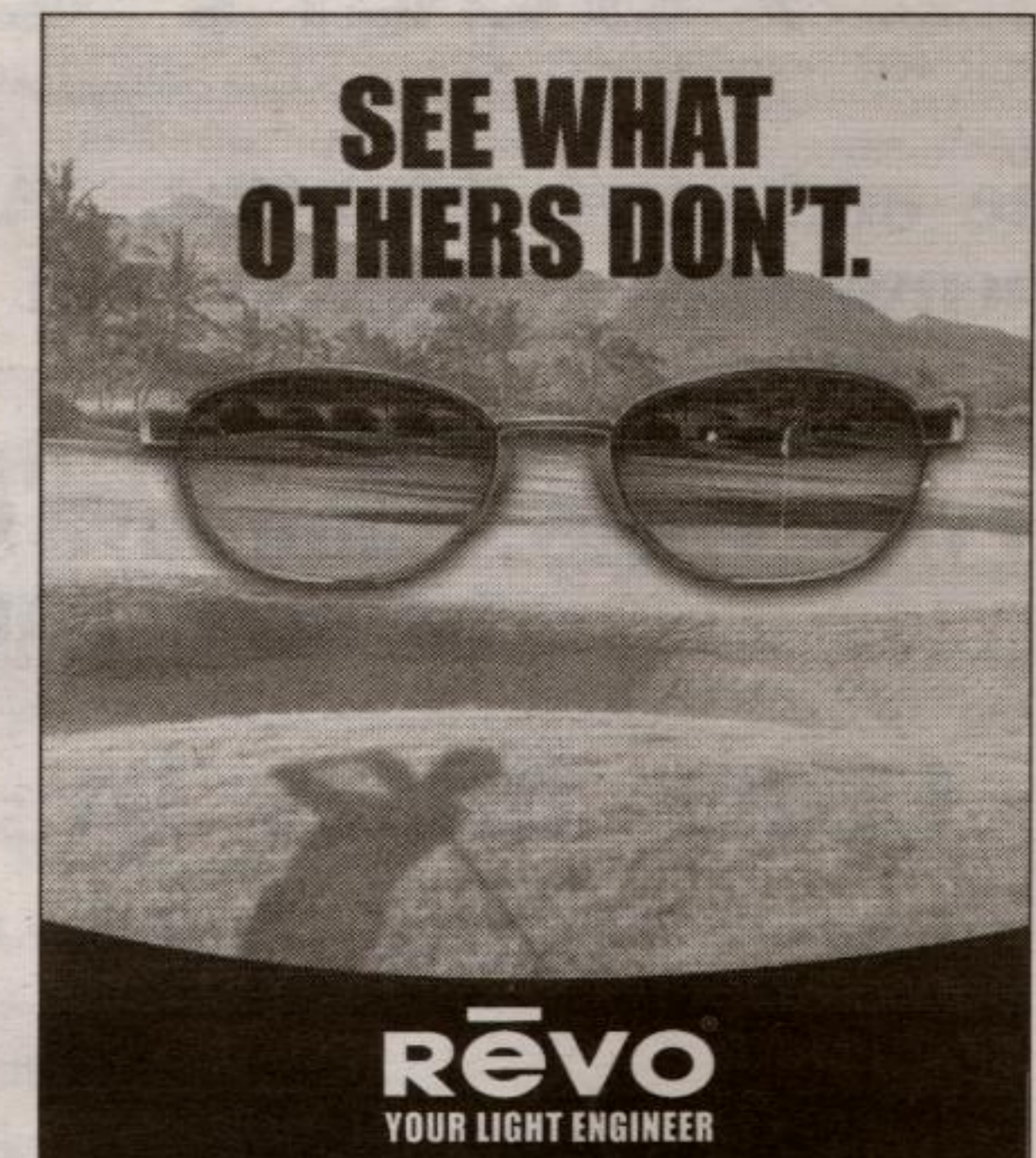
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