

Taxes keep rising

By DEBORAH QUAILE

Taxes are set to increase despite the Guelph/Eramosa Taxpayers Association's (GETA) protests and proffered solutions

"What happened to these campaign promises?" asks the bold yellow poster on the Rockmosa Community Centre wall.

When Mayor David Adsett was up for re-election, he promised to work hard to ensure taxes were under control, look for the best ways to get value for tax money, and listen to people's concerns and resolve issues.

Concerned citizens from across Guelph/Eramosa Township don't believe that's happening within the current council.

In a crowded meeting with members of the Guelph/Eramosa Taxpayers Association, on May 27, many new individuals and families were purchasing memberships in the association to secure their solidarity.

Chairperson Wally Mayes said, "GETA represents over 450 families in the township. We were born of taxpayers who expressed concern over the tax increases last year. We held a tax rally last fall, and the council and mayor stated if we organized they'd hear our concerns."

The GETA mandate is to work cooperatively with Guelph/Eramosa Township Council to look for ways and means to improve its efficiency to ensure future tax increases are within the ability of the taxpayer to pay.

Many meetings later, however, GETA and residents feel their concerns are not being met. "Historically," Joe Martin noted, "in 1998 Eramosa had a six per cent tax increase." He continued by saying that in 1999 after amalgamation, Guelph Township residential rate was up 10 per cent.

In 2000 there was no increase, in 2001 Guelph/Eramosa residents experienced an average 40 per cent increase, and in 2002 residents are again experiencing another two per cent increase. The township portion of the tax bill is about 24 per cent, with the County picking up about 50 per cent and the province approximately 26 per cent (these are the three splits in the taxing authorities).

Mr. Martin continued that the recommendations prior to the 2002 budget were: Provide taxpayers with a

tax credit of \$200,000 in 2002; Reduce 2002 budget expenses to reflect the cost saving to the Township through the transfer of garbage collection to the County; Reduce staff levels to 1999 level; No tax increase for 2002; and Limit increases in expenses to 1999 level plus inflation.

Yet even as Mr. Martin continued to demonstrate the Township's budget figures to the audience, it was clear that spending has taken a turn for the worse. Revenues have decreased but expenditures rose dramatically, with general expenses alone increasing by approximately \$193,000 between 1999 and 2002.

"Expenses at the township are rising rapidly and they've got to find some efficiencies," he added.

Several township services were transferred to the County of Wellington, such as garbage collection, library services, policing and the official plan, but "these savings have not been reflected in our taxes - in short, we're paying more in taxes for fewer services from the Township."

As well, residents are still taxed by the County for the above-mentioned services.

"Our attempts at this point have not come to much. We spend a lot of time crunching numbers and had some meetings with the Township... but if this is an example of cooperation, I don't know what we're dealing with."

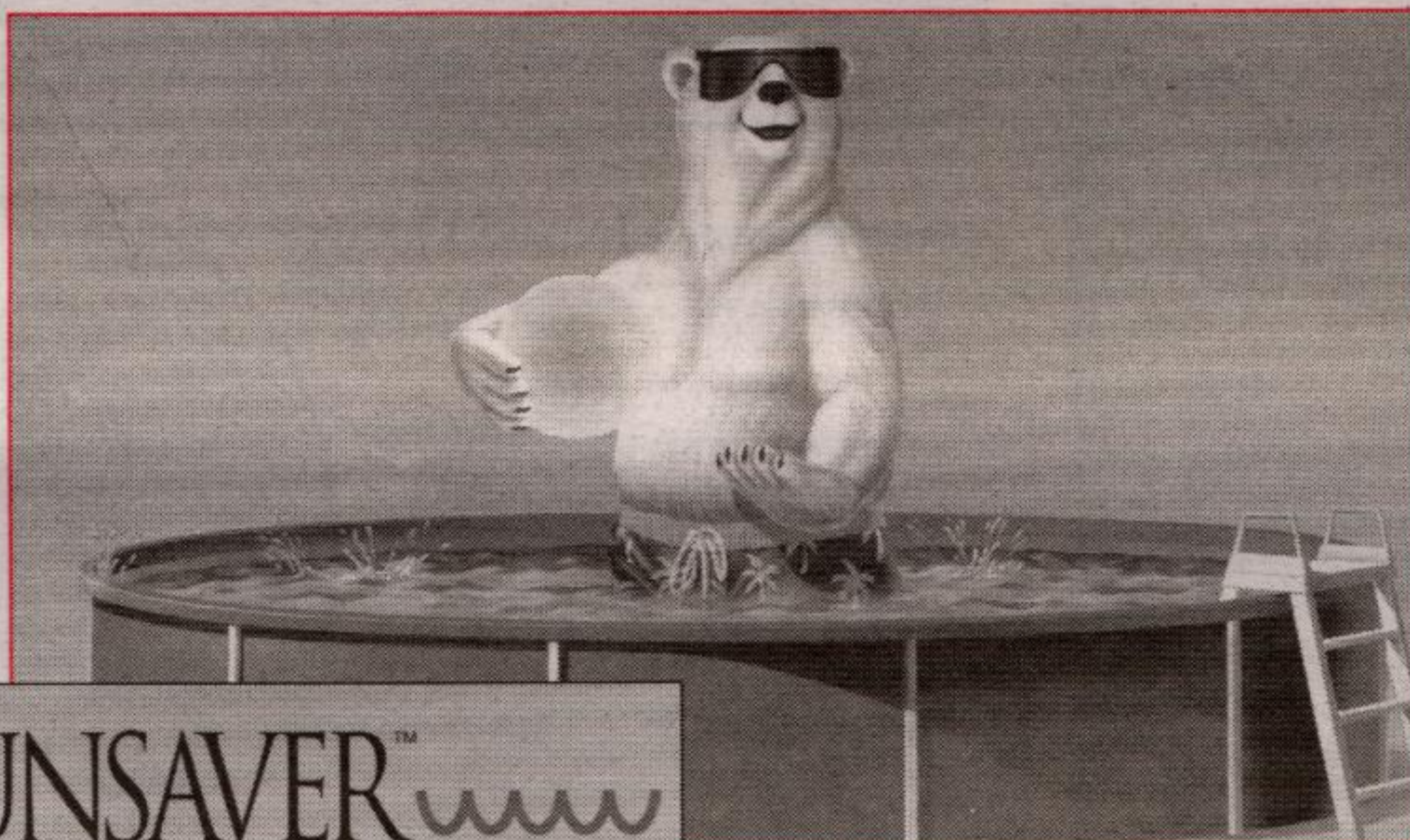
Mr. Martin also mentioned that with property assessments increasing, next year (2003) could see another significant tax increase.

Mr. Mayes stated that as taxpayers, residents all have similar concerns. "We as an organization want to work cooperatively with council but we get frustrated. There is only one way to make something happen - to phone or fax or email them and let them know how you feel!"

There was no representation by the mayor or council at the GETA meeting although they had been invited. A unanimous motion was submitted by Ron Nicholson and seconded by Bob Pecora that all members of GETA or taxpayers should express their concerns over the level of taxation within the township to the Guelph/Eramosa Township Council, as well as local press.

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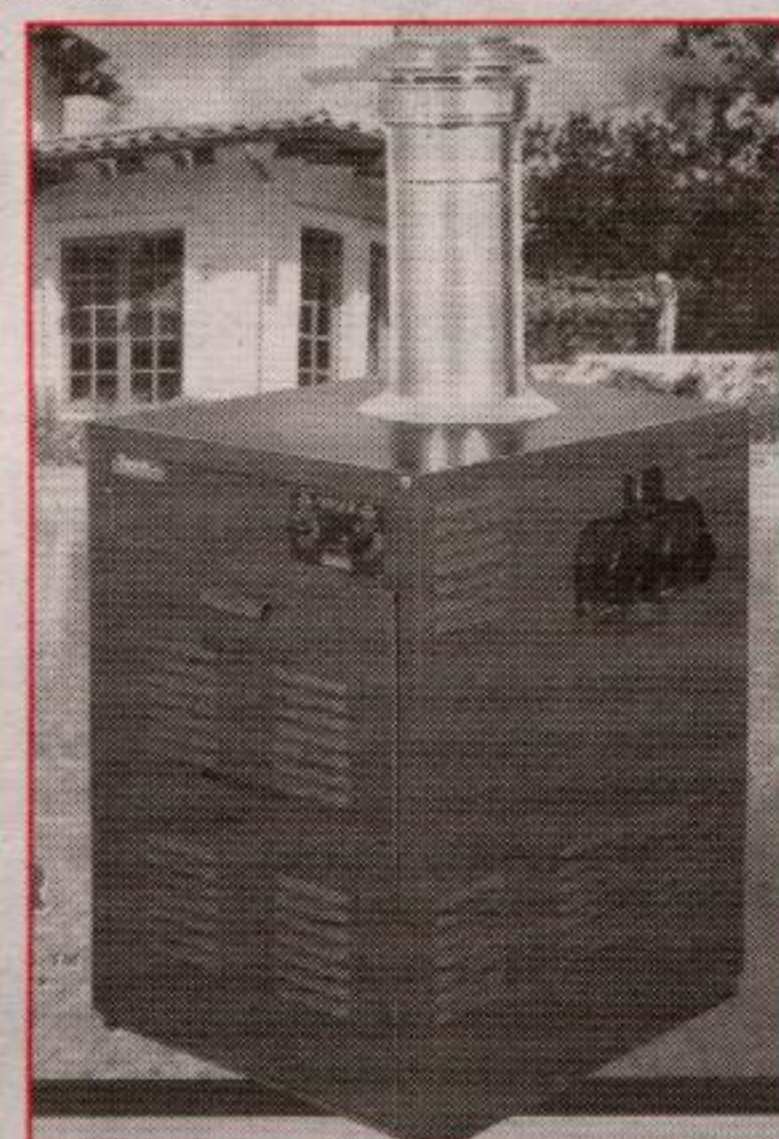
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