

Percy Merry to close

By DONNA DANIELLI

Parents of Percy W. Merry Public School students fought back tears as the Halton District School Board made the decision to close their school on November 20. Percy Merry will remain open until June 30, 2003 at which time it's full complement of students will switch enrollment to Sam Sherratt Public School in Milton.

A small rural school, located on Britannia Road, west of Trafalgar, Percy Merry has a Ministry approved capacity of 220 students. Unfortunately, the school's current enrollment is 92 students and Halton District School Board (HDSB) estimates enrollment will drop to 65 students by the year 2010.

Delegations of concerned parents flocked to the public meetings (held prior to the finalization of HDSB's report) and these same parents crowded the HDSB board meeting to protest the closure.

Many delegations spoke of the need to change the catchment area for Percy Merry School. Lands that would originally have been part of the Percy Merry catchment area, were re-zoned as urban lands when the new subdivisions were built in Milton. The students from the subdivisions were sent to various schools in Milton to await the building of a new school in Milton's west end.

"We can fill any school we want to if we change boundaries," explained Dr. Dusty Papke, Director of Education. "You have to look at the full issue and the full jurisdiction. The intent is to put the schools in the areas where the kids are - in facilities that will meet the needs long term."

Board Chair Ethel Gardiner echoed this sentiment.

"We cannot build schools in growth communities unless we close schools with low enrollments. We know there will be growth in Oakville and in Milton and we are not going to be able to accommodate those students long term unless we deal with accommodations now."

Mrs. Gardiner went on to point out her home riding of Georgetown is in desperate need of new schools that cannot be afforded under the HDSB's Capital Strategic Plan without the closing of Percy Merry.

The financial implications of the decision were what ultimately decided its fate. In a report that recommends Percy Merry be closed, it states that keeping the school open would drastically affect the cash flow of the Capital Strategic Plan and the decision to close Percy Merry would result in additional New Pupil Place Grants from the provincial government of \$242,000 annually for 25 years - a total of \$6,050,000.

Burlington Trustee Peggy Russell and Milton Trustee Erica Andrew were the lone holdouts in the vote that eventually went against keeping Percy Merry open.

"I don't feel confident that the trustees are fully aware of where we stand with the Capital Strategic Plan," said Mrs. Russell.

Milton trustee Erica Andrew submitted an amendment to the motion closing the school, asking the decision be delayed until the fall of 2003. Having attended three days of the Education Quality Task Force public meetings, one message came through loud and clear for Ms. Andrew.

"I have heard the same messages being delivered over and over

again," said Ms. Andrew. "Among the messages is the lament of boards being forced to close schools in established communities in order to build schools in areas of rapid growth. As a result of present and future development in Milton and Oakville, and pending the Rozanski Report, I ask you to support this motion. In my opinion it is premature to close Percy Merry at this time. We need to wait."

Many of the parents who have made presentations both at public meetings and at the Board meeting, feel it is Percy Merry's status as one of the few rural schools in Halton that weighed so heavily in the decision to close it.

"We contend that the Halton District School Board has intentionally targeted Percy W. Merry and created a low enrollment status through discriminatory and inconsistent policies," stated David McCann.

In addition, the Board has withheld the privilege of providing in school spaces from many new families in Milton. Instead, the Board has forced many of Milton's new students, unknowingly, into schools that are at full capacity and dependent upon portables to accommodate the excesses."

Mr McCann went on to accuse the Board of closing Percy Merry to

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Photo by DONNA DANIELLI

A number of local artists showed their creations at the recent semi-annual Art Show and Sale. Held at Upstairs At Loblaws, the show featured works in many different mediums created by the Tuesday Afternoon Art Group. Shown here with some of her work is Campbellville painter Marg Wilkes.

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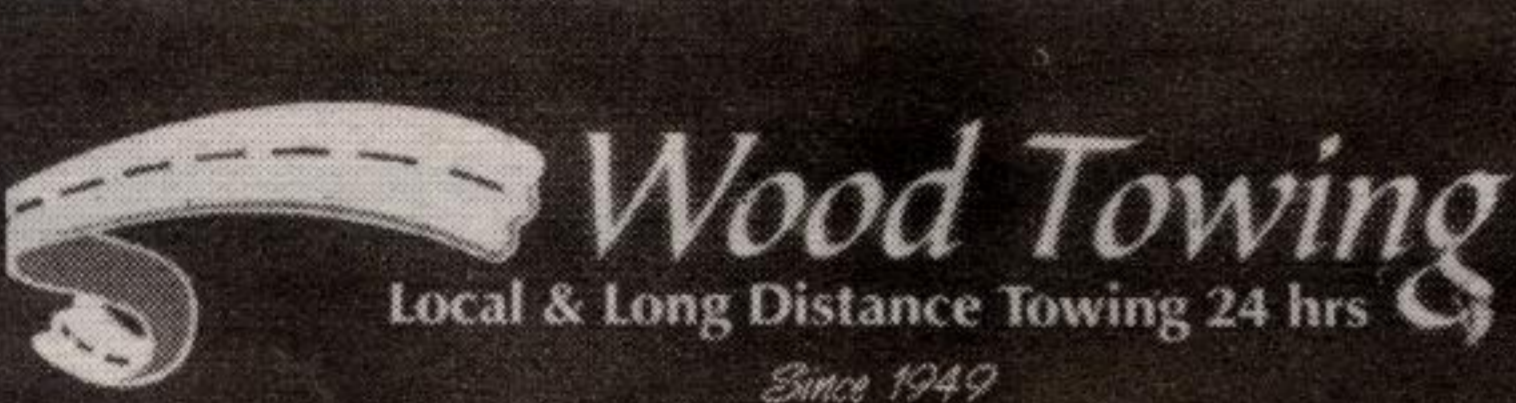


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