

# Ontario Finance Minister visits Milton

By DONNA DANIELLI

Janet Ecker, Ontario's Minister of Finance, recently spoke to a crowd of about 50 members of the Milton Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Ecker announced that the provincial government is on its way to tabling its fifth balanced budget, despite increasing demands. She explained: "We are no longer increasing the mortgage on our children's future. We don't have a deficit. We've paid down \$5-billion on the provincial debt."

According to Ms. Ecker, approximately 225 tax reductions have been put into effect since 1995, allowing for growth that has resulted in \$16-billion more in tax revenue. This year, Halton has seen \$117-million of this revenue invested in highway expansions, new schools, water improvement, health care and transit.

In addition, the potential crisis of the double cohort situation in

post-secondary education has been averted, according to Ms. Ecker. "Our commitment was for every willing and qualified student to have a spot in a post-secondary institution, and that goal has been met." There has been \$1.2-billion spent on expansion and \$2.8-billion on operating costs to meet the needs of the double cohort, she explained.

Changes in the education system have included a more comprehensive curriculum, mandatory teacher training and testing, and standardized tests and report cards. "It was tough for kids, and it was tough for teachers, and we did get a lot of criticism," admitted Ecker. "What we are seeing now on national and international tests is that our kids are starting to learn better. That's what it's all about."

Health care is getting an increase of almost \$2-billion in

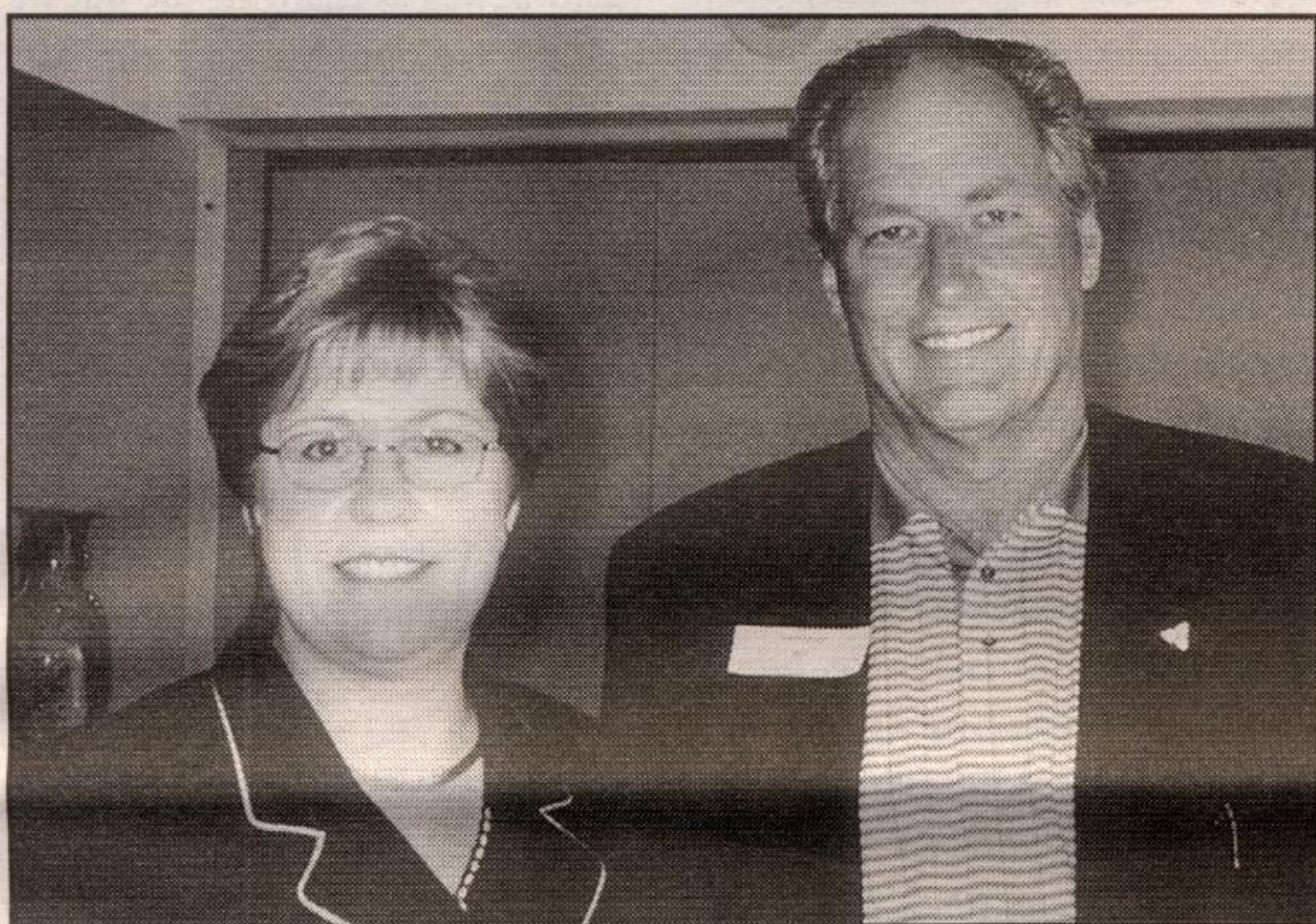
funding this year. Halton will see part of this funding with 1,600 more long-term care beds and a \$75-million dollar expansion to Milton District Hospital, which will include an MRI machine by 2006. Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital will receive an MRI machine in 2008.

Senior citizens are to receive property tax rebates on the education portion of their taxes. This law has been passed and went into effect on July 1. Application forms will be sent to seniors in September, and rebate cheques are expected to be mailed by December. "Helping our seniors to stay in their homes, through supports we've put into place with community care and also through the property tax rebate, is just another step to help seniors to continue to have a good quality of life," said Ms. Ecker.

## Money talks

Ontario Finance Minister, Janet Ecker (left), made an appearance at a luncheon hosted by the Milton Chamber of Commerce on August 26. After a brief speech about Ontario's economy, Minister Ecker met with Chamber members to discuss hydro deposits for businesses. Halton's MPP, Ted Chudleigh (right), is also Minister Ecker's parliamentary assistant.

PHOTO BY DONNA DANIELLI



## GO improves service for Georgetown

By GLORIA HILDEBRANDT

GO Transit is undertaking a couple of projects that will improve service for Halton Hills' commuters, namely increased parking at Georgetown and a new station on the Georgetown rail line.

"The access points are difficult at Georgetown," says Greg Ashbee, Senior Project Engineer for GO Transit. "We're planning to expand parking at the downtown Georgetown station." Construction is expected to begin early this month on land that has been bought on the north side of the station and is expected to be completed by the end of October.

A new station is planned for the Brampton to Georgetown line.

Called the Mount Pleasant Station, it will be located in Brampton at the corner of Creditview Road and Bovaird Drive or Highway 7. The station is intended to increase access to the Georgetown rail corridor and enhance GO service for commuters in Brampton and Georgetown. GO estimates that 8,296 people in Halton Hills reside in the new station's catchment area and some of these might use the train.

"The new station might be convenient for people in south Georgetown," says Mr. Ashbee. "It will be a point to get on the train as opposed to Georgetown station."

GO Transit is currently in the process of a preliminary design and

environmental assessment. A public meeting was held in Brampton on June 4, and a second one is planned for late September or early October. People interested in the development of this station can contact Mr. Ashbee at 416-869-3600, extension 5211, or grega@gotransit.com.

The new station will have a bus loop, and a kiss and ride area. Ultimately it is expected to provide parking for 1,200 vehicles. The first train is planned to leave around 6:35 a.m. and the last arrival is to be around 6:35 p.m. Construction is expected to begin in the fall of 2004 and to be completed in the spring or summer of 2005.

Since the black out, the Progressive Conservatives have seen a spike in their ratings. Anticipating the election being called, Ms. Ecker promised the Milton Chamber of Commerce: "You have Ted Chudleigh's and my commitment that we will continue

to put into place a comprehensive economic plan that has the single goal of achieving more growth, more jobs and more prosperity here in this province for you in your business life and for you in your family life."



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