

Wassail the excitement

Traditional Christmas entertainment in Georgetown

By DONNA DANIELLI

The holiday season is a time of joy, a time to relax and enjoy the many fine events offered. Those with a love of fine old English customs are invited to the John Elliott Theatre in Georgetown on December 11 for *Wassail*.

This festive celebration for the whole family features traditional village carols, English country dances and seasonal narratives amidst the recreation of a nineteenth century English village Christmas.

Come and enjoy traditional Morris and sword dances, while mummers play, and poetry and prose describe the seasonal customs. Many of the carols from *Wassail* have been collected from village choirs, and the tales told in the performance have been taken from the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Let the children cheer along as the tra-

ditional mummers celebrate the triumph of good versus evil, complete with mock fights pitting a hero against a challenger. The whole family can take part in the rollicking good fun of *Wassail* as it is presented by writer, director and producer Tom Siess. Performing groups in *Wassail* are the Wassail Choir of London, the London Playford Dancers and the Forest City Morris and Sword dancers.

Tickets are on sale for this fabulous holiday event at the John Elliott Theatre Box Office by phone at 905-877-3700 or in person Tuesday to Saturday from 2 to 6 p.m. Ticket proceeds support the Halton region Museum, home to more than 35,000 artefacts and dedicated to maintaining and showcasing Halton's history from prehistoric times to the present day. Ticket prices are \$25 for adults and \$15 for children aged 12 and under.

It's Not Faire!!

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the Maryland Renaissance Festival that has attracted over 225,000 visitors annually for more than twenty years. This is a goal that one artisan feels may have been a little too optimistic for the Ontario location. The artisan, who asked that her name not be published, speculated that the parent company expected to see comparable crowds in Ontario, and though the Festival pulled in record attendance last summer at 65,000 patrons, it wasn't enough to keep the doors open. A press release on the Ontario Renaissance Festival's website from a few years ago would seem to support this theory as it reads "It is the intention of the Festival operators to develop the Ontario Renaissance Festival into the largest of its type by its eighth season. Given the results of a comparative demographic survey of southern Ontario against established markets, the promoters are confident that Canada would be able to boast this claim."

This hypothesis seems to be supported by the letter sent to the entertainers and artisans who found their summer employment at the Ontario Renaissance Festival. It stated that the parent company could no longer be expected to operate the show without the possibility of making some money to recoup the debt involved in purchasing the 250 acres of woodland the Festival sits on and establishing the Festival. When contacted at the head office for International Renaissance Festivals, Ltd. President Jules Smith would only say: "We just have closed our gates and that's it. I don't want to get into any speculation or rationale. I have no comment."

The sudden announcement has left patrons and entertainers shocked. "I think it's really unfortunate because it was pretty unique," said regular attendee Pat Hancock. "I think that kids really got a kick out of it and got a taste of history in a really unusual way." Performer Andy Blau, who has entertained crowds with his alter ego Zoltan the Adequate since the Festival opened its doors nine seasons ago, called the announcement a tremendous shame. "The festival is an incredible, different venue in the Southern Ontario area," he said. "We've had over a half million patrons come through the gates in the time we've been open, some who have been coming regularly since we opened.... For everyone connected with the festival, this is a great disappointment." Still, Mr. Blau, like many of the other fans of the Festival, holds out a little hope for the future, that a purchaser for the event may be located. "I've got my fingers crossed that something will happen in the next few months, something that will save the festival, or there's going to be a lot of disappointed faire-goers come next summer."

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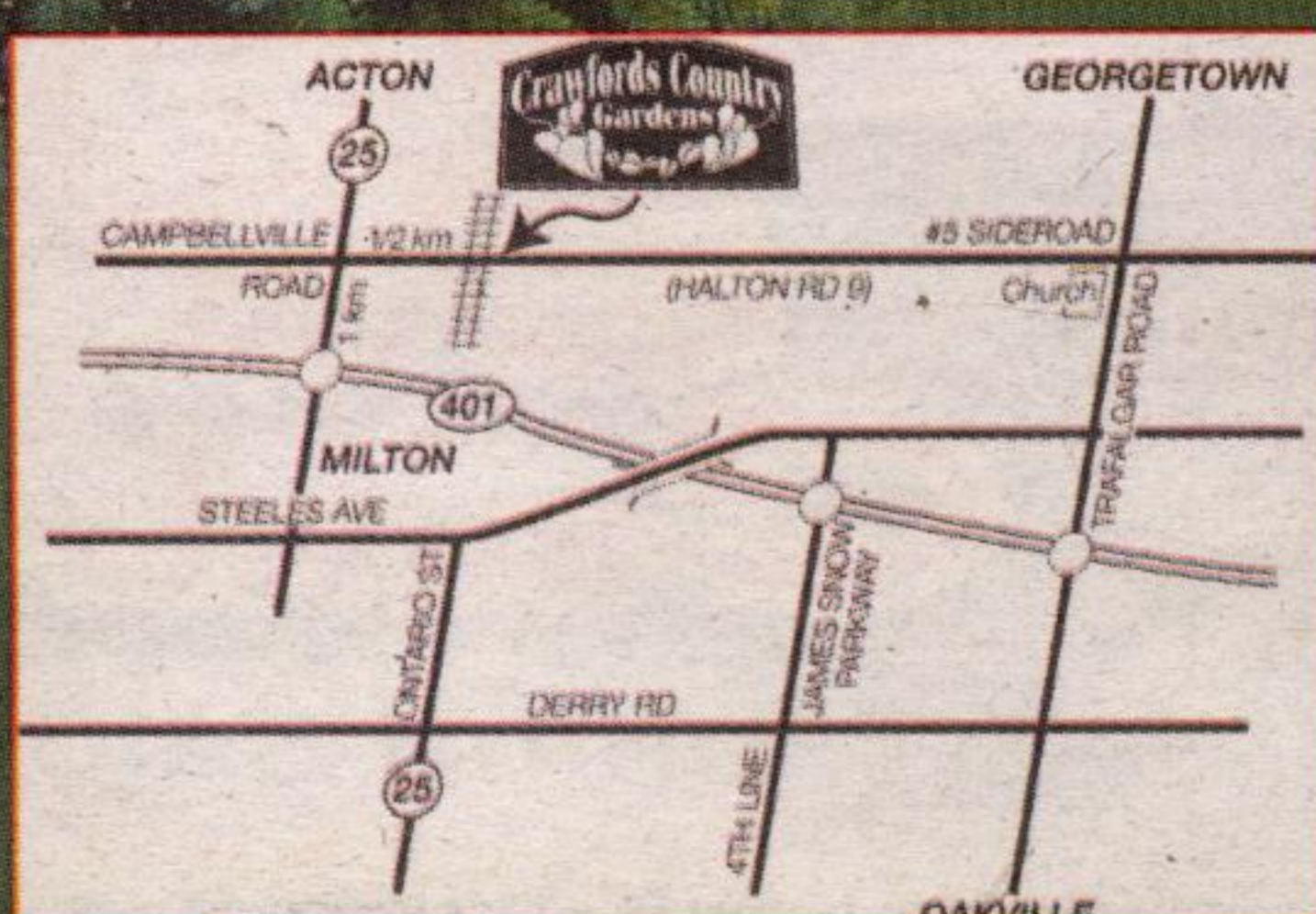
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