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THE HALTON COMPASS



REGIONAL NEWS, NOTES AND NEIGHBOURS

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PHOTO BY ANN KORNUA

Nassagaweya sunset - the calm before Saturday's storm on Guelph Line.

Tax controversy nags at equine industry

BY DONNA DANIELI

The nagging threat of increased taxation might just end the dreams of Leslie Brooks and Jim Waechter. After twenty years in the corporate world, the husband and wife team pooled their finances to build the J.L. Equestrian Centre, a facility specializing in boarding horses and offering lessons, in Kitchener last year, only to have the taxman deliver a whopping bill a few short months later.

"When you apply for a new building permit on your property, it absolutely guarantees that you will be re-assessed," explains Jim. "MPAC (Ontario's Municipal Property Assessment Corporation) has determined that we are commercial in nature. We had no idea this was happening. We had six weeks notice

to pay \$15,000."

Leslie and Jim are fighting to change the legislation that is seeing some of Ontario's equine industry based farms taxed commercially instead of as agricultural. While many equine related businesses, such as breeding and training horses still fall under an agricultural distinction, a grey area exists for equestrian facilities such as riding and boarding establishments. The absence of legislation specifically detailing these establishments as agricultural is resulting in a commercial tax bill for the owners. In some municipalities, this means a rise from a 0.3 per cent agricultural rate to a commercial rate of 4 per cent, an increase of 1300 per cent.

"Our property taxes are more than ten per cent of our gross revenues," Jim points out. "To assess us as though we are a Wal-Mart is simply unfair."

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