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# THE HALTON COMPASS



REGIONAL NEWS, NOTES AND NEIGHBOURS

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## Strawberry fields

PHOTO BY STEPHEN BAKER

Getting ready for the Milton Strawberry Festival are hospital auxilliary volunteers (left to right) Betty Nisbet, Sheena Drennan, Jo'Anne Schilling and Joan Griffiths. Rounding out the bevy of beauties is Bert Andrews of Andrews Scenic Acres, whose strawberries will be the featured ingredient at the festival being held on Saturday, June 25 at the Milton Fairgrounds.

## How long will agriculture survive?

BY STEPHEN BAKER

**F**ood Chain is a non-profit organization of Canadian Agricultural Commodity producers that is 'concerned with current and future economic outlook of the agricultural industry in Canada'. The co-chair of Food Chain, Bruce Pearse addressed the GTA Countryside Mayors' Alliance last week on the subject of the viability of agriculture in Ontario. His message was bleak. "For the first time in over 80 years, Ontario agriculture has lost money as a whole sector. There is real and pressing economic crisis in rural Ontario. Since 2002, the cumulative loss of Canadian farm income has been between \$10 billion and \$13 billion... between 1991 and 2001 the number of farm operators under the age of 35 dropped by 51.3%... during the same period the number of farmers over the age of 55 decreased by only 7.5%... How long before this trend is irreversible? It is now. We have suffered long term loss now... What is the solution? One solution would be to close the border."

For more information visit [www.foodchain.ca](http://www.foodchain.ca)



Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette with Bruce Pearse

# Minister of Health praises Bonnette's fight to save Georgetown Hospital

BY STEPHEN BAKER

**R**ick Bonnette, the mayor of Halton Hills, was the host last week to the Greater Toronto Area Countryside Mayors' Alliance. This brains trust of the eleven mayors of the rural municipalities surrounding Toronto meets every six months or so to discuss mutual areas of interest.

The special guest speaker at Friday's session was the Honourable George Smitherman, Ontario Minister of Health and Long Term Care. The Minister addressed the struggle that Halton Hills has had in having its hospital be part of the William Osler group. He recognized the difficulty in balancing the needs of northern Etobicoke with its inner city health conditions with those of rural Georgetown. The Joint Policy and Planning committee considered the gravitational pull of population on multi-site hospitals and was swayed by Mayor Bonnette's arguments to preserve the present level of service in Georgetown. The announcement last week that Georgetown Hospital would join with Milton and Oakville

Hospitals to form a Halton healthcare group was welcome news to all Halton communities.

"A higher level of service is seen when more of a medical procedure is done in the local hospital," said Smitherman. "There is a need to protect the smaller hospitals. I offer my congratulations to the people in this room for their efforts, especially Mayor Bonnette."

Minister Smitherman went on to announce that he was devolving some of his powers to the fourteen Local Health Integration Networks in Ontario. There will be a nine-person committee formed with six government appointees and three local members. The committee will have important powers of decision-making that are presently only enjoyed by the minister. "Healthcare in Ontario is a \$33 billion a year industry and it can't be run practically just from a remote head office in downtown Toronto," said the Minister. Georgetown physician, Dr Elliot Halperin will be on the

committee representing Halton's interests. "It will be a lot easier for Rick Bonnette to pick up the phone and call someone (Dr Halperin) in the front line of healthcare with this new system."

The Minister acknowledged that there was a lot of work to do on the land ambulance front and that present 'ambulance off-load delays' were not acceptable. Mayor Krantz of Milton pressed the Minister on the fact that the present healthcare system in Milton is geared for a population base of only 30,000 whereas the current population of Milton is closer to 54,000. Minister Smitherman said that he was looking at 'multi-year funding' of the healthcare system and that they didn't yet have a complete grip on the buying side of the system. A move to volume based funding was being worked on. "\$6 billion over five years is what is needed for healthcare in Ontario," said the Minister "but we don't have \$6 billion in hand."

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