

EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

Voters opt for change

Mayors toppled like five pins on election day Monday including veteran Halton Hills Mayor Marilyn Serjeantson. Councillor Kathy Gastle rose from the ranks to capture the mayoralty in a close race that saw her take 46 per cent of the popular vote to Mayor Marilyn's 42 per cent.

Robert Heaton, a former councillor, took votes away from both leading candidates by capturing the remaining 12 per cent. Numbers indicated voters wanted change.

There were few surprises in Monday's municipal balloting for council. Incumbent Clark Somerville was an easy winner in Ward 1 Acton while former hydro commissioner Dobbie Frizzell emerged from the pack to pick up Acton's second seat, closely pursued by former councillor Jake Kuiken.

As expected Bryan Lewis lead the polls in Ward 2 (rural Halton Hills) with Joan Robson taking the other seat. Incumbent Kevin Kuiack was short of the necessary votes for Ward 2 has two new faces.

Acton's Rick Bonnette ran away with the Wards 1 and 2 regional seat with over 4,000 votes and now becomes the senior statesman on council. As expected, Regional chairman Joyce Savoline easily retained her job as Halton's chief.

Irene McCauley easily retained her seat on the Catholic School Board.

Unfortunately, only just over 39 per cent of the electorate bothered to vote, numbers which indicate most people were indifferent or satisfied with the status quo. In view of the fact the elected officials will be dealing with millions of dollars which directly affect taxes on homes and business, it's a poor reflection on our fiscal priorities.

Let's hope the upcoming federal election can generate more interest and ballots than Monday's exercise in democratic elections did.



Rev. Mark Tiller and children from St. Alban's Church survey over 80 shoeboxes filled with gifts for children in war torn Africa. The boxes were blessed on Sunday before being shipped overseas as part of the Christmas Child Program. Churches, schools and service clubs filled 30 million boxes last year.

Central America is fascinating

Coles' Slaw

with Hartley Coles



While the publisher and staff were burning the midnight oil this scribbler went gallivantin'! The opportunity to traverse the Panama Canal and Central America was too inviting to pass up. Especially since the vehicle was a brand new ship on its "maiden" or inaugural voyage. Wife Irma and two friends were my companions.

I'll fess up. I've been through the Panama Canal before. It was not a new experience. But the voyage also included trips to Nicaragua and Costa Rica, two Central America countries I've a special interest in both for their culture and the enterprise they show in dealing with the modern world.

This interest was piqued by an earlier visit to Costa Rica which sits between Nicaragua and Panama. A full-fledged democracy with roots that go back into the 15th century and Columbus, Costa Rica is the jewel of the Central American isthmus.

Unlike some Latin banana republics, Costa Rica disbanded its army after one bad episode. The money they save goes into social benefits, education (Costa Rica has a 94% literacy rate), and infrastructure.

Spanish is the official language but a lot of Costa Ricans speak English. It's fairly easy to find your way around especially with a knowledgeable and enthusiastic guide.

Stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans, Costa Rica has only about 3.5 million people who live in areas that range from tropical

rain forest to dry highlands not unlike Ontario. Active volcanoes and daily earthquakes keep like interesting. A variety of deadly snakes in the fields and gardens keep you alert. They are especially abundant in the sugar cane and coffee plantations which attract rats and mice, reptile food. At risk are the migrant workers from the Central American countries who cut the cane and pick the coffee beans.

This country has an employment problem not unlike Ontario. Costa Ricans don't relish the hard field labour, so migrant seasonal workers are allowed in to cut the cane and pick the coffee while the well educated inhabitants work at the better jobs.

North on the Pan American highway, Nicaragua is as different from Costa Rica as night from day. Largest in Central America it is a Third World country, recovering from the Sandanista dictatorship which even sold its railway to enrich themselves. After nine years of democracy they are slowly recovering from the repression. There's still lots of poverty.

In the lush countryside cattle barons raise herds of mainly Brahmin

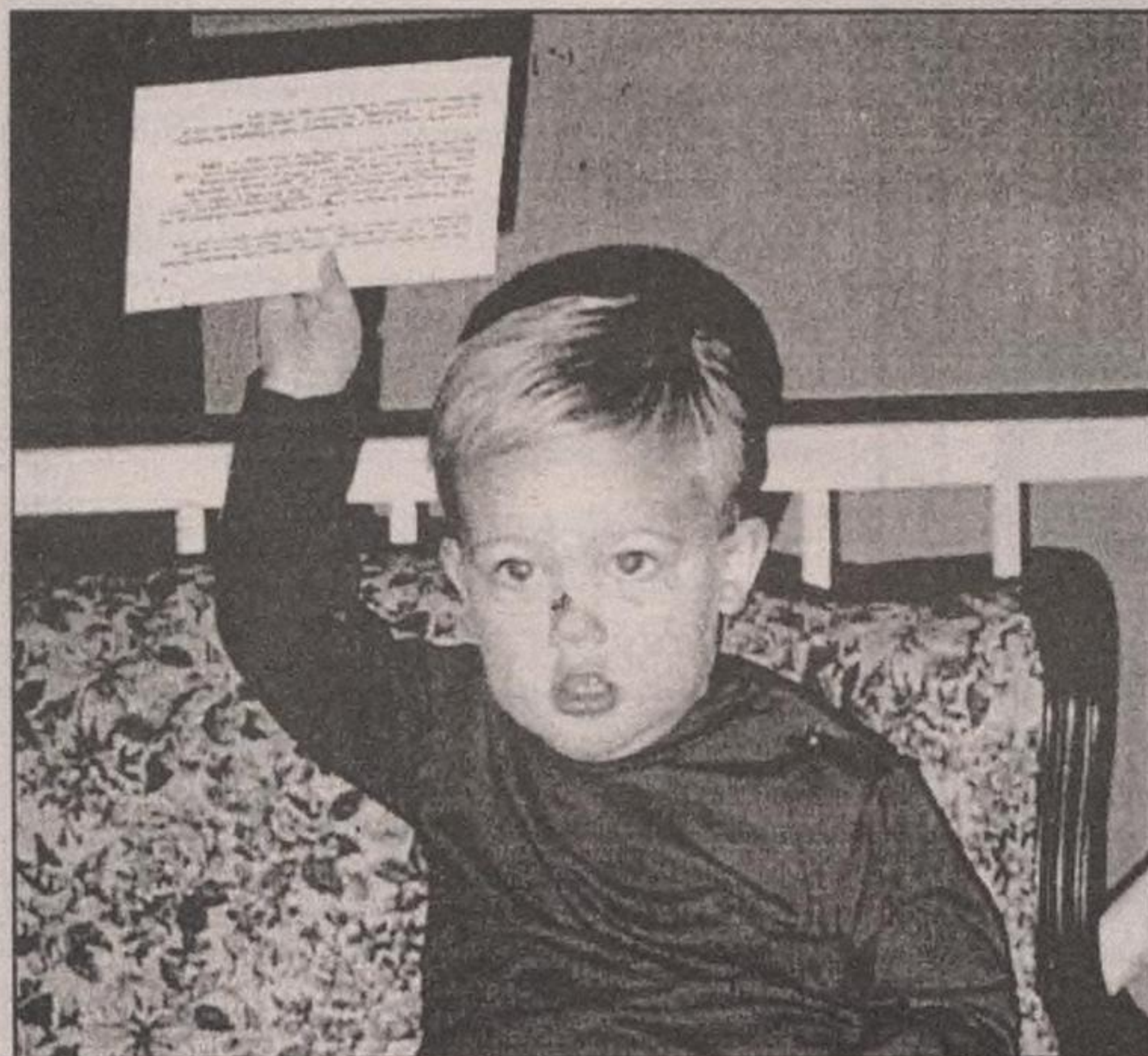
cattle side by side with bananas, coffee and sugar cane plantations. Snakes are especially a problem. Vipers bite and kill cattle, ranchers offer people the equivalent of 50 cents for every viper they kill, a dangerous occupation. Nevertheless, one family, I was told, took over 100 snake skins in for their 50 cent bounty.

While there I visited the old city of Cordoba, its past still resplendent in the Spanish colonial buildings at the city's core. It's a beautiful country, but the unemployment rate is over 50%. Nicaraguans have to scratch by for a living. Tourists are targets for children who sell souvenirs for those Yankee dollars they covet. Some trouble-headed youngsters merely touch your arm, raise a forefinger and softly utter one word, "Uno" asking for a dollar.

Advised to simply shake our heads, the children simply move to another person. They're never obstreperous. Some do well on the street.

The people of Nicaragua have been described as hospitable friendly and open but what struck me was despite the poverty and obvious lack of this world's goods they didn't have the poverty-struck look. In fact their happy attitude would contrast sharply with those who have an abundance in our own country.

The Costa Rica visit was the final chapter in a 10 day voyage on the spanking new MS Amsterdam. More on the Panama Canal next time.



POTTY POLITICS: Twenty-two month old James Bursa of Acton was surprised to find he was on the voter's list for Monday's municipal election. His parents said James was hoping Barney the dinosaur was on the ballot. - Frances Niblock photo



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