

EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

Home owners pay

Halton Hills Treasurer Ed DeSousa acknowledged in an article in last week's New Tanner that the Town ranks "about the worst" among 41 municipalities surveyed in the percentage of total taxes paid by home owners for programs and services.

Any changes in service levels which may result in a tax increase is mostly borne by homeowners, rather than sharing it proportionately among residential, commercial and industrial taxpayers. The upside of the survey is that Halton Hills ranked seventh lowest, at \$675 per person, in charges per person for services and programs.

The solution, according to the treasurer, is to attract more industry and business to Halton Hills and to shed the town's image as a bedroom community. More business and industry would share the tax burden instead of piling 86.6 percent of it on homeowners for services and programs.

Several changes have been suggested such as adding more industrial land, including the development of the 401 corridor for prestige industries. However, the land isn't serviced yet and is unlikely to attract industry until it is.

Mr. DeSousa got it right when he noted that the 401 corridor is so far removed from Acton and Georgetown that, if you want to work where you live, a relatively new phenomenon, Halton Hills will need more industrial zoned land in the two urban centres.

Georgetown has little industrial capacity left while there are about 110 to 115 acres of vacant industrially zoned land in Acton, half of which has potential sewer and water allocations. That doesn't include the large former Beardmore property which has no sewer capacity allocation and is the subject of an environmental clean-up.

The 401 corridor, of course, is part of the trade-off with Milton when regional governments were introduced in 1973. Milton got all of the Township of Nassagaweya which, then Reeve Anne McArthur used her influence to keep as one unit. Halton Hills, realizing the potential of land along the 401 for industry, bargained to keep that part of Esquesing Township from the Third Line east to the borders of Peel Region along the highway.

It appears at this point that Milton got the best of the deal. They inherited the Mohawk Raceway in Campbellville which has become a cash cow since the introduction of slot machines. They realized over \$2 million last year, their share of the booty from the one armed bandits. Halton also has the serviced land north of the 401 where industries have been locating regularly for easy access to 401. North of 401 in Halton Hills is still mainly rural but if serviced would certainly attract industry. Unless they extend the Big Pipe from Milton north, the land will likely stay that way.

However, Allan O'Neill, the Town's economic development officer, maintains there's enough industrially zoned land in Acton to supply the market's needs but some of it must be serviced. He anticipates developing the lands as "dry industrial" to attract business and industry.

One way the Town could make Acton more attractive to business and industry is to employ better housekeeping practices in Acton's industrial park where bulrushes, swamps and piles of dirt compete with existing industry. Its appearance, in places, certainly doesn't add to the appeal of the town.

Another way to attract business and industry would be to streamline the process, or "fast track" it so resettlement of existing industry and new wouldn't face so much bureaucracy. And that's a job the mayor and council can nudge.

Unless there's some action home owners in Halton Hills will continue to pay for 86.6 percent of programs and services.

Tip of the chapeau

The Town works department deserves a big bouquet for the fine job they did opening up streets and sidewalks after last week's weather fury which downloaded tons of snow and intermittent rain on the district Thursday.

Downtown Acton, which was socked by the snow, was all cleaned up on Friday and commerce was back to normal for the weekend. There was some fist waving at snowploughs that filled in driveways after they had been blown or shovelled out. Most of it was good-natured banter at drivers who really have no alternative but to keep going.



SHOE TREE: Passersby on Winston Churchill Rd. S. Norval are astonished by the sight of a tree loaded with boots and shoes of every description. Those familiar with the current rage say there are several such trees around where footwear is hung in pairs or singly. - Ted Tyler photo.

Taking a dip in the briny

My fascination with Mexico goes back a long way, so when the opportunity to visit coastal resorts and cities there, on what is known as the Mexican Riviera, presented itself last fall, I wasn't hesitant about signing up. My wife Irma and another couple, Frances and Jean Marcoux went along for the R&R and the chance to see Mexican culture on the Pacific coast where the "gringo" influence from the United States sometimes overwhelms the Latin.

As you might have guessed it meant booking a cruise on Holland America's MS Statendam. It docks at San Diego, California, and heads south for 10 days, visiting ports such as Puerto Vallarta, Acapulco, Zihuatanejo (Ixtapa), Mazatlan & Cabo San Lucas along the coast.

This cruise meant we were completing the circuit of a previous journey which took us from Fort Lauderdale in Florida over the Caribbean Sea through the Panama Canal and north along the Pacific coast to Costa Rica, Nicaragua and then to Acapulco.

This time the ship took us as far south as Acapulco where after a day of shopping, and bargaining in a Mexican flea market, we shipped out, retracing our voyage back to San Diego. If you've never seen the City of Acapulco from a ship at night, as it recedes from view, you are missing one of the world's spectacular sights.

The horseshoe-shaped bay is ringed with mountains. At night the tropical foliage fades in the dusk and the mountains and city burst into

Coles' Slaw

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thousands of lights. It created a fantasy world, a sight that not even the most tantalizing brochure has ever recaptured.

This trip was not without its hazards. It was booked a few days after Sept. 11, 2001, when people just stopped travelling and the fear of air travel was an epidemic. The day we flew out to San Diego, the newspapers were rife with stories about terrorist threats at Los Angeles airport and the Golden Gate bridge in San Francisco, too close to San Diego for comfort. Nevertheless, Air Canada flew us there without incident and we were comfortably encased in a motel early that evening, right on the flight path of the airport.

Although we were in sight of our ship and the rooms were comfortable, the noise of large aircraft flying about 30 feet overhead was not conducive to sleep, especially from the top floor. San Diego is a story in itself. However we had little time to enjoy it before embarking on the Statendam. Some day we're going to go back, God willing, and take in the city.

The only other hazard we encountered on this trip, which was

unbearably hot from about 10am till about 4 in the afternoon, was in Cabo San Lucas which sits dramatically at the tail end of the Baja Peninsula, torn between the Pacific and the Sea of Cortez. The last port on our trip, we had to be tendered to shore.

To take in the sights we hired a glass bottomed water taxi to view the fish and the sea lions sleeping soundly on the enormous rocks that comprise the divide between the ocean and the Sea of Cortez. After we tried unsuccessfully to wake up all the sea lions along the coast, the man at the helm agreed to take us to a beach for a swim although the swells were tossing the boat around like a cork.

Since I was in the prow, it was my job to jump on the beach, grab the line and hold the boat secure while the others clambered ashore. Timing my jump with the swells, I lit neatly on the sand - and plunged chest deep into four feet of azure blue water.

I had the presence of mind to hold the bag which contained my bathing suit aloft so it wouldn't get wet. The rest of me was soaked. Two men on the beach sprang to my aid. The rest of them got ashore without incident and we trekked over hot sands to a nearby resort where they traded clothes for swimsuits. I, of course, traded wet clothes for a dry suit.

Swimming in the swells was impossible because of a strong undertow. Our water taxi returned to pick us up in a smaller boat sans glass.

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