

Horse people challenge assessment

The Ontario Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) decision to change to property assessment of some of the province's equine industry from agricultural to commercial has ignited a letter writing campaign from horse people to the Minister of Finance Grey Sorbara.

Local horsemen say the financial impact is so severe that some horse barns have already gone out of business and many others are sure to follow. Data from OMAF indicates the equine industry's annual economic impact in Ontario is \$579.1 M with an additional \$5.9 B invested in fixed assets.

OMAF data also indicates there are 53,000 horse barns in rural areas across the province and

more than 253,000 Ontarians who ride horses to enjoy the physical and recreational benefits, many from this area. Horsemen say that more than 51,000 people directly employed by equestrian facilities will be hurt by the MPAC decision.

Some equine-related businesses such as breeding and training horses or providing services to race horses are deemed to be agricultural uses but any properties in "grey areas" like equestrian facilities automatically default to commercial class. The result has been an increase in property tax from an agricultural rate of 0.3% to a commercial rate of 40% - a 1300% increase.

In addition to the current increase, MPAC chose to make

some, not all, of the reassessments retroactive two years resulting in property tax bills for tens of thousands of dollars due and payable in a matter of weeks. Horsemen say individual barn owners simply don't generate the revenue for commercial rates.

"Riding establishments are not the playgrounds of the wealthy," horsepeople say. They provide riding lessons to children and adults, children's summer camp programs, therapeutic riding programs for the disabled and board and care for horses.

They contend MPAC is inconsistent in its evolutions, not recognizing that equestrian facilities have the same agricultural uses and services as the horse racing industry.



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CENTRES' BENEFIT: Rob Wilkinson of Tanners Restaurant presents a cheque for \$1,000 to David Burland, president of HHCSI for Acton and Georgetown youth centres. The funds were raised at the Sold Out Dinner with Valdy on November 27. Valdy, the famous Canadian folk singer, enjoyed a meal with his fans prior to his concert at Robert Little School. Valdy makes his way through Ontario every 18 months or so, and enjoys the intimacy of small venues and a chance to meet his fans on a personal basis. - Submitted photo

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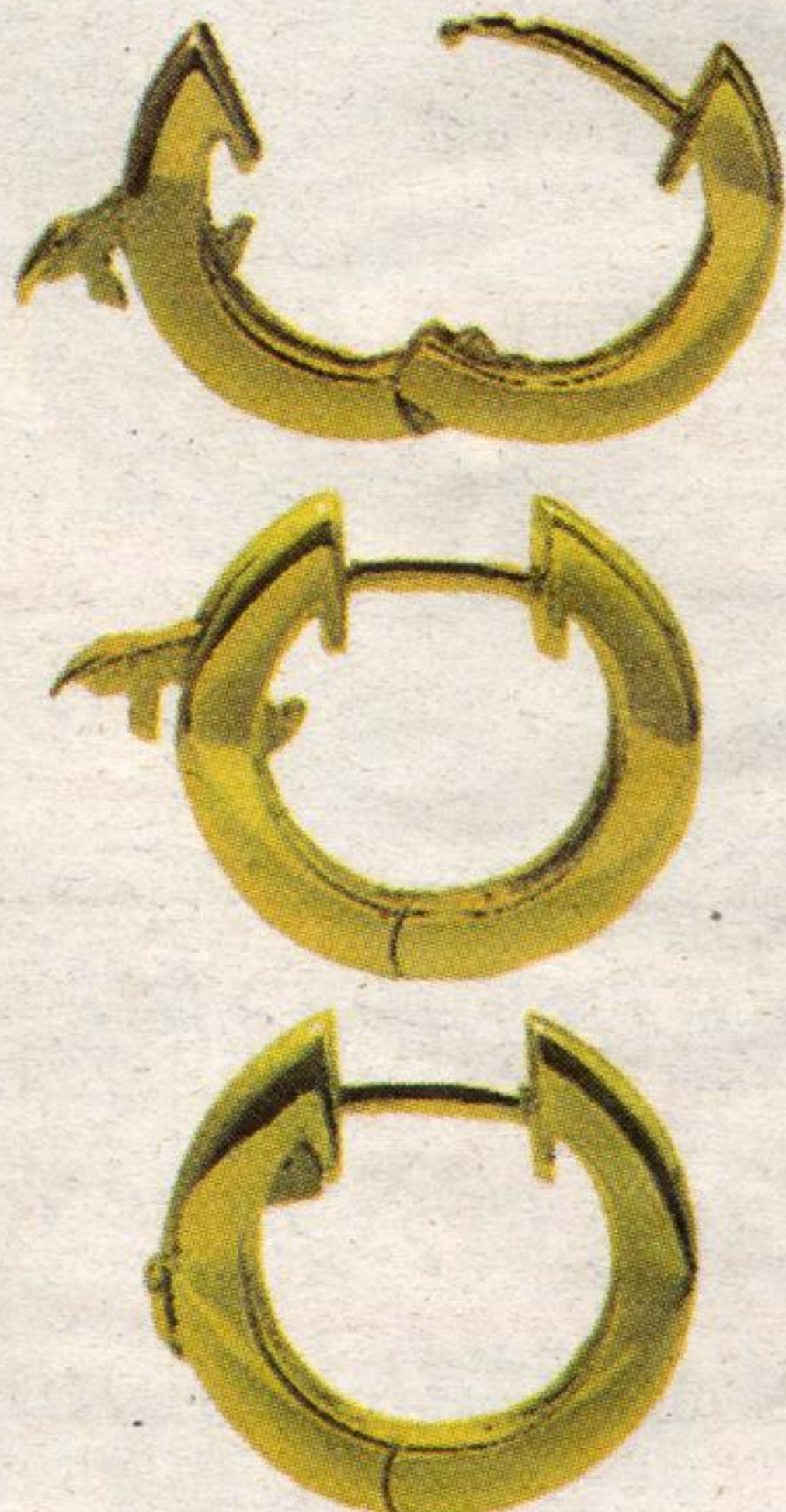
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