

# EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

## Nurse games

It looks like the "health care crisis" in Acton will be eased somewhat by the hiring of a Nurse Practitioner (NP) to work with doctors at the Acton Medical Centre. A year late perhaps but better late than never.

The province announced in May 2003 that Halton Hills was one of 117 municipalities to get \$110,000 annual to help pay for a nurse practitioner. The position was not filled partially because the Town had a \$15,000 budget shortfall. Funding is now in place annually and the position is being posted.

Screening of candidates will be followed by interviews with Dr. Alshabaraju of Acton Medical Centre and Halton's recruitment officer says she hopes the final selection will happen soon.

NPs, of course, are registered nurses with advanced medical training. They can diagnose disease and disorders, treat minor illnesses and prescribe a variety of medications, working closely with family physicians.

There should be no shortage of candidates since Ontario's Liberal government announced in January it is discharging 750 nurses who work in the provinces hospitals, including some who specialize in psychiatry, obstetrics and cardiac care. The action has caused some confusion in nursing circles since during the election Premier Dalton McGuinty promised to hire 8,000 new nurses.

Then in Opposition, Mr. McGuinty said, "Let no one ever suggest that a nurse in a hospital is redundant. Let no one ever suggest that a nurse in a hospital is anything but precious." (May 6, 2003).

Obviously Mr. McGuinty changed his mind.

However, the crowning moment in the discussion about Liberal election promises came last week when someone wanted to sue the government over breaking an election promise. At this juncture a provincial judge told the plaintiff that they didn't have a hope in hades of winning the case because no one should put any stock in election promises.

The comment was right on but it doesn't say much for our politicians. And we're sure most nurses aren't impressed.

## Overtaxed...and why

If you think you're overtaxed you have an ally in the Ontario Municipal Administrators Association. They point out Ontario property taxpayers will likely be hit with even higher bills in 2005, 2006 and 2007.

The Association's "take" on the reasons for the constant increases:

The increases are largely driven by Ontario's massive infrastructure deficit and two forces that are beyond municipal control:

1. Ontario relies too heavily on property taxes to fund its municipalities; and,

2. Unlike other provinces, Ontario uses property tax revenue to fund its social service, social housing and healthcare programs.

Ontario already has the highest property taxes in Canada. It is a more visible tax than income or sales tax, and it is a regressive tax, without any direct link to a taxpayer's ability to pay.

Over the past decade, municipalities have relied on reduced expenditures, deferred capital investment, increased user fees and reduced debt to balance their budgets without having to increase property taxes further. This has created lean organizations with high deferred maintenance and infrastructure renewal costs, as evidenced by the following:

\*According to Statistics Canada, municipal administration costs in Ontario are 31 per cent lower than the national average.

\*The current municipal infrastructure deficit is estimated to be more than \$25 billion. As a percentage of annual spending, this municipal deficit is three times greater than the current provincial deficit.

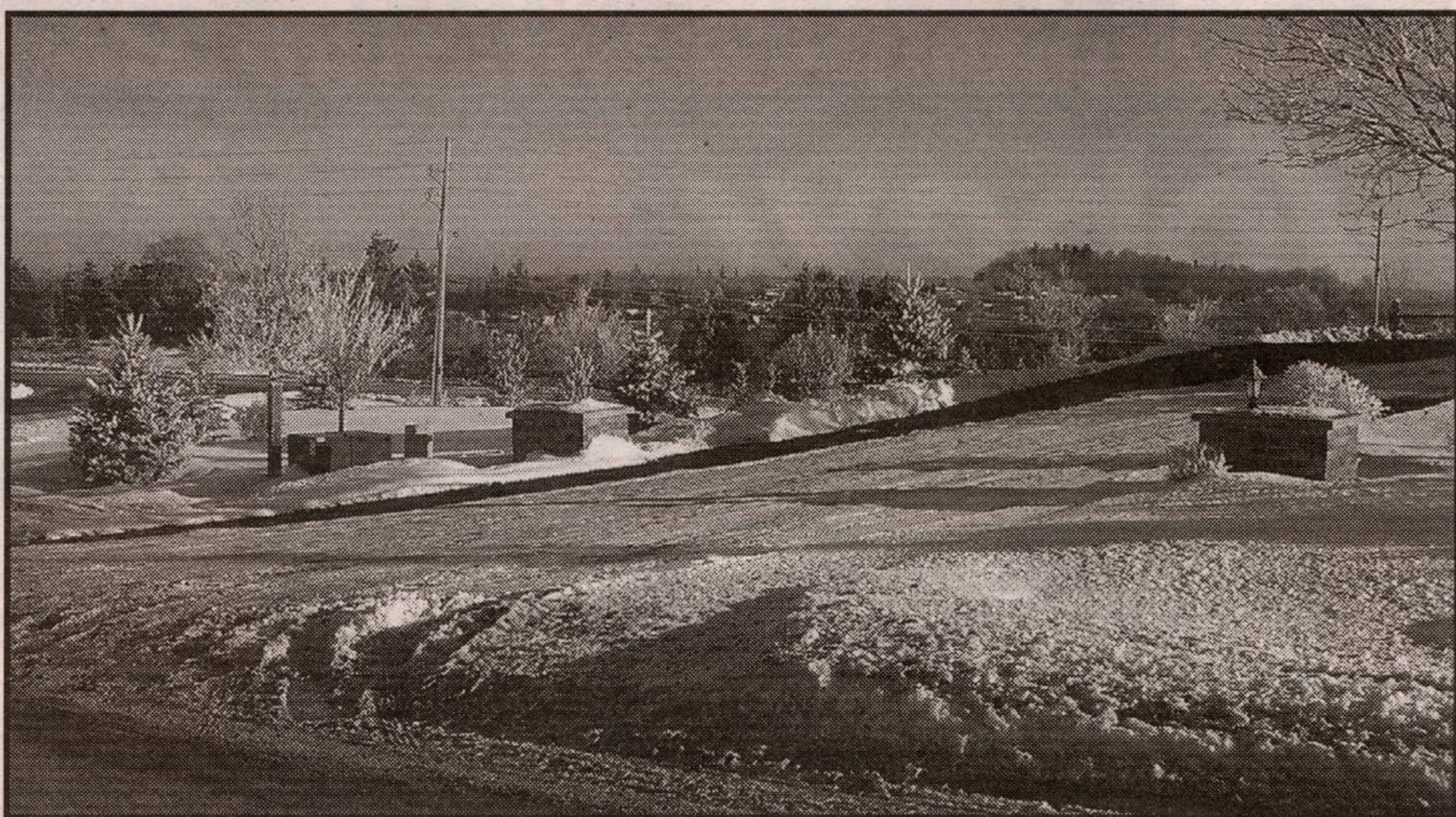
Property tax revenue has not kept pace with inflation. Between 1997 and 2002 consumption taxes grew by 22 per cent, income taxes grew by 15 per cent and property taxes grew by just 6 per cent. Even with cuts to various income tax rates, income taxes grew 2.5 times faster than property taxes.

Increasing municipal debt is not a viable solution because municipalities lack the revenue to pay debt serving costs.

Ontario will face a property tax crisis unless the changes are made to how municipalities are financed and what services are funded by property taxes.

Municipalities must seize the initiative on this issue. Failure to do so could have devastating effects on the fiscal strength of Ontario municipalities and the quality of municipal services.

Makes sense doesn't it?



Frosty February Morning

## My one shot movie cameo

From starring in Hollywood flicks to selling posturepedic beds may require a stretch of the imagination but for Tinsel Town & Bionic Woman, alias Lindsay Wagner, it's a fact of life. There she was on the telly the other night extolling the ease with which arthritic limbs could ease their way into the posturepedic bed she's thumping the tub for, and the comfort enjoyed once you're ensconced in one.

This scribbler was particularly interested in the fact it was Lindsay Wagner because I once played a very small part in one of the movies she made in Canada when she still was recognized as the Bionic Woman. It was a sudden turn of events for someone like me to emerge from behind a camera to stand in front of one and for someone who only actually goes to the pictures about twice a year and can't tell Raquel Welch from Sally Field.

When I worked for another newspaper about two decades ago the publisher informed me our office would be part of a Walt Disney movie set which would be shown on network television. It would star Lindsay Wagner and Robert Urich, names which meant as much to me then as Procter and Gamble or the Smith Bros. on the cough drop packages. That is until someone mentioned that Ms. Wagner was the Bionic Woman in a TV series popular at the time along the lines of Xena, Warrior Princess. My antenna went right up because I had caught some episodes of the series which

### Coles' Slaw

with  
Hartley Coles



was a sort of female foil for the Six Million Dollar Man.

Consequently when Sharmill Productions started moving equipment into the office and Lindsay Wagner came with them there was instant recognition.

This particular movie was, of course, about a newspaper and the film company had chosen our office as typical of small town newspaper offices - messy. Lindsay Wagner was a reporter on the newspaper and a part time Toronto actor named Marshall Perlmutter played the part of the editor. As the plot unfolded I tried to bury myself in paper work at the desk, keeping one eye on the production crew and providing background.

At this juncture for some reason known only to himself, the film's assistant director spotted this serf at his desk and politely asked if I would do a walk on with the star. It would consist of hiding behind the front office door until, at a propitious moment, I would stumble into the path of Ms. Wagner, who after a heated session with the editor, was in high dudgeon. All make-believe, of course.

My part, playing the part of a

typical newspaper executive, was to get the heck out of her way as she seethed past but sort of ogle her as she wheeled past. "You know," the director said, "just act natural."

After two or three brief rehearsals the actual filming started but in my first brush with the Bionic Woman she was totally unprepared for my presence. When I appeared behind the door her baby blues showed genuine surprise. But she was a trouper, continuing with the scene as I stumbled into the camera.

It took only two or three "takes" to get the scene right. Other members of the staff also had bit parts in the film which I have to admit I've never seen. Some who did said my scene must have ended up on the cutting room floor because they never saw it. I wasn't surprised. However, a couple of weeks after the film was released I got a call from my sister in Michigan who said she was surprised to see someone who looked suspiciously like me in a film with Lindsay Wagner.

I admitted it could be me but so far no offers to replace Robert Wagner or Harrison Ford had come my way.

In any event when I saw the Bionic Woman advertising posturepedic beds on the telly this week the entire episode passed before my eyes again. It was my only paid acting job - \$72 and change - and there hasn't been an offer since. It was just another of the surprising moments a newspaper job provides occasionally.

Yep, and she still looks gorgeous. Wouldn't you buy a bed from her?



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