

Hydro rates decrease

For the first time in many years Halton Hills residents will see a decrease on their hydro bills this year. As of January, 1 Halton Hills Hydro reduced its rates by 2 per cent.

That will amount to about an annual \$20 savings for the average Halton Hills hydro customer, and about a \$45 annual savings for those customers who heat their homes with hydro. Collectively Halton Hills Hydro customers will be paying about \$700,000 less for hydro this year than last.

"This is quite a turnaround," said Halton Hills Hydro new general manager Dave Collie. "Not in anyone's recent memory has there been a decrease in hydro rates."

While he admits the decrease is not huge, in the past customers were used to budgeting about an \$80 increase per year.

Collie credits the decrease to two main factors.

He said Ontario Hydro, where the utility company purchases its hydro from, has committed to a zero rate increase this year.

"That amounts to 85 per cent of our costs," said Collie.

The other factor which played a part in the decrease is the fact that management at Halton Hills Hydro has been downsized.

"I am replacing two positions, the previous general manager and the accounting manager," said Collie.

Collie said those two retirements plus a third, will help save the utility company money this year.

"There was a push through the social contract to make cuts, and the utility looked at streamlining the operation."

Collie added the fact many customers are on pre-authorized chequing plans is also a money-saver for Halton Hills Hydro.

Halton Hills residents get opportunity to comment on Recreation Master Plan

By LISA TALLYN
Staff writer

From now through the end of the month Halton Hills residents will have a chance to check out the draft 10-year plan of the town's current and proposed parks and recreation facilities.

The draft report of the Recreation Master Plan Public Review will be available in the Acton and Georgetown libraries until January 31.

Those interested in commenting on the draft will have until February 4 to submit their comments to the town's Recreation and Parks Department. The final draft of the plan is to be presented to council by the end of February or March.

Paul Stover, the town's supervisor of facilities said the master plan is the town's "first complete assessment" of the town's recreation facilities and programs.

The review, conducted by the Institute of Environmental Research Inc., cost \$80,000, half of which was provided by the Ministry of Tourism.

Input was provided by council members, town staff, residents and recreation program users.

The public review revealed the Recreation and Parks Department is "finding it increasingly difficult to maintain quality facilities and services due to an aging physical plant, limited parkland for construction of additional facilities and decreasing resources."

It also stated, due to the faltering economy, the department will face many challenges to just maintain the existing standards of service in the future.

Half of the Halton Hills residents who responded to the Master Plan survey said additional recreational facilities were needed in the town.

Based on those needs, facilities required in the short term include the lighting of two existing ball diamonds, the development of a rugby/football field and two new lit

ball diamonds in the Georgetown South Community Park, and a new Acton Arena to replace the aging facility.

Also in the short-term the Recreation and Parks Department would look at doing a feasibility study for a 25-metre indoor leisure pool and an Arts Resource Centre to possibly be located in Cedarvale Park.

Community centres like those in Cedarvale Park, Hornby and Norval would be phased out.

Stover said the timing of these facilities will depend upon the town being "financially capable" to introduce them into the community. He added that capability will be linked to the town's tax base, need for the facilities and the availability of funding from the provincial and federal governments.

"Regarding the phasing out of the community centres, the Master Plan is questioning whether they are serving a need. We are actually supplying office and storage space for community groups. As the facilities age (and need repair work) we will have to determine if it is worth putting money into them," said Stover.

Medium term recommendations in the Master Plan draft include the development of a 25-metre leisure pool, community programming space for seniors programming, an

Arts Resource Centre (which could include an arts and crafts area and gallery), an unlit softball diamond, soccer field and four lit tennis courts in Georgetown South Community Park, and the replacement of Memorial Arena by twinning Gordon Alcott Arena.

Proposed long term recommendations include an outdoor performance space at Cedarvale Park, an arena in Georgetown South after a feasibility study, two lit and one unlit soccer fields at future parks in Halton Hills and five lit ball diamonds at future community parks.

The survey revealed overall the public was satisfied with the supply of parkland in Halton Hills, and respondents were interested in an expanded trail system and purchase of natural areas by the town for passive parkland.

Program and service recommendations included in the Master Plan Draft include changing the name of the Parks and Recreation Department to the Department of Community Services.

The current parks technician position is to be replaced with a permanent position, and a vacant recreation services position is to be filled.

The report also recommended the department should continue to establish partnerships with other agencies to deliver services.

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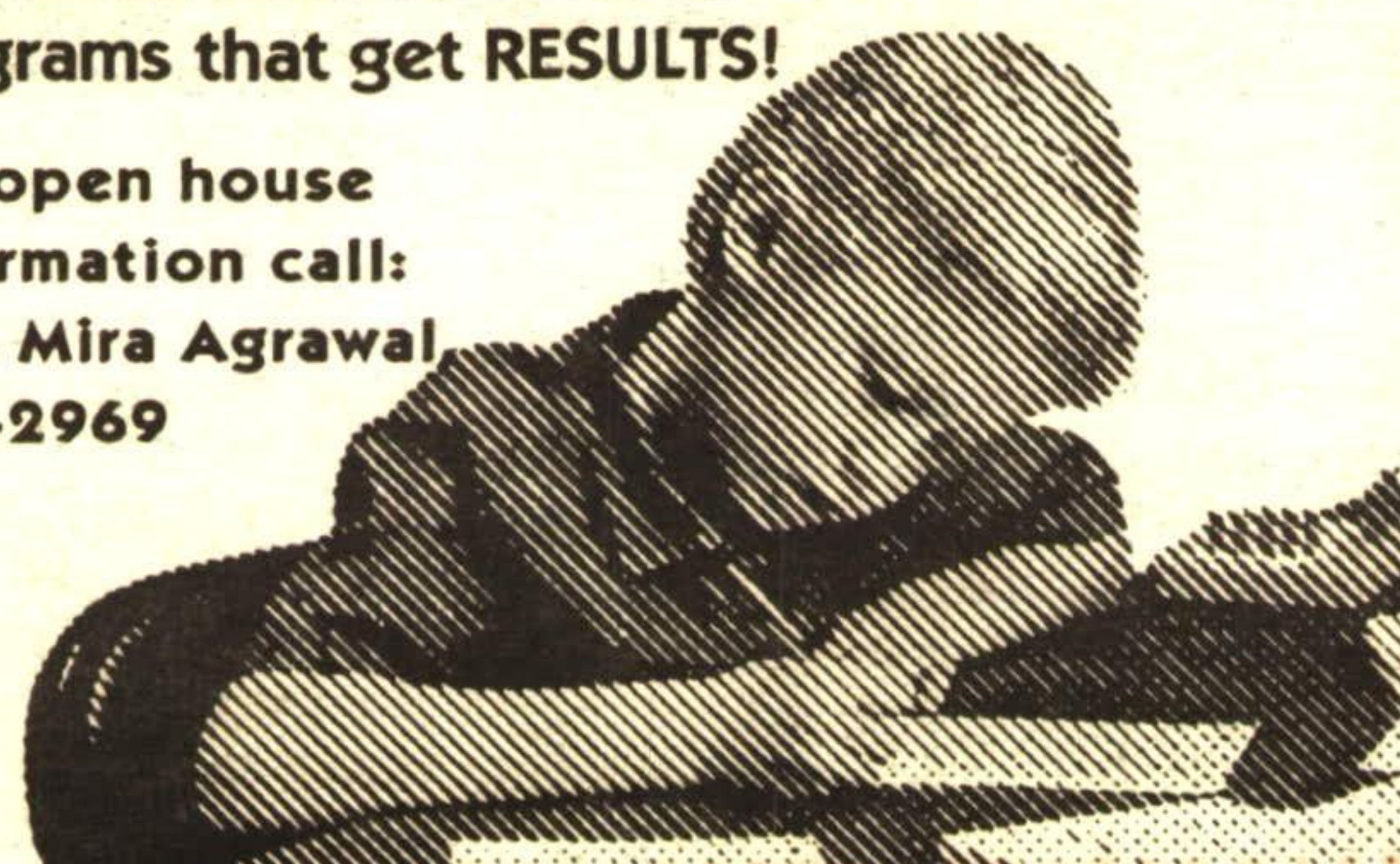
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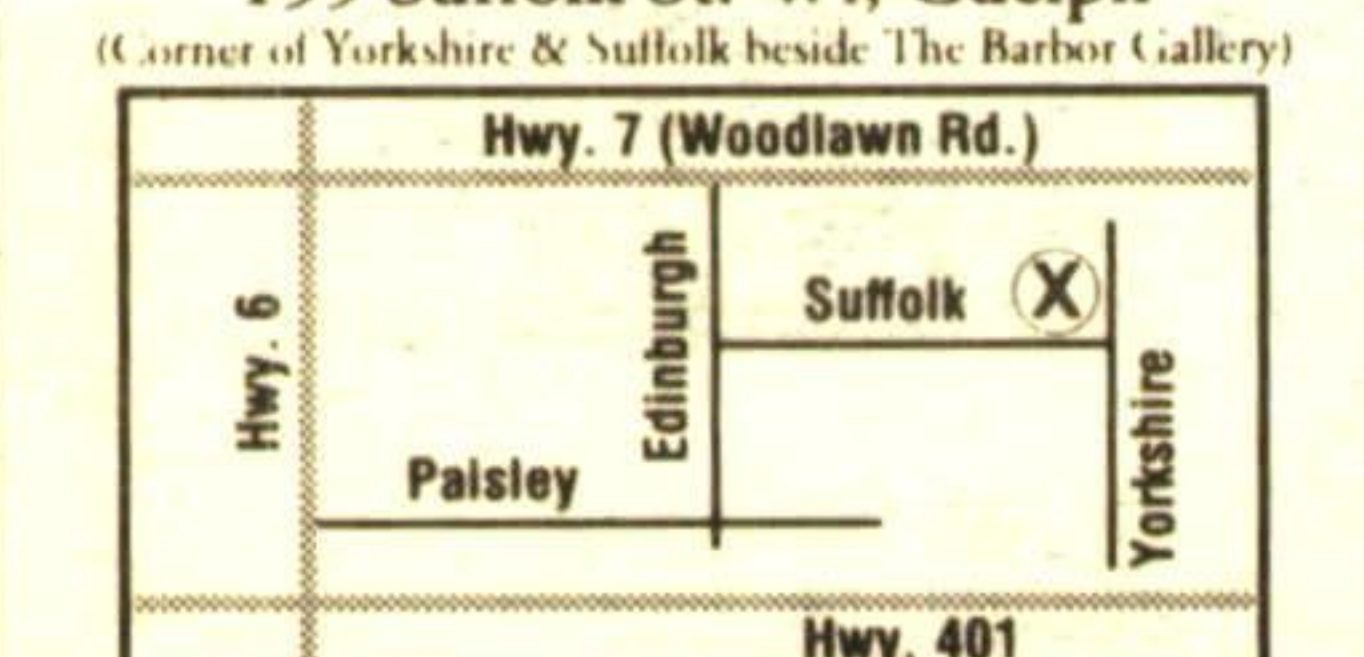
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