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NEWS AT A GLANCE

Thieves sought
■ A video cassette that recorded four males stealing a picnic table, valued at \$75, from the Halton Hills Hydro office in Acton at 11:45 p.m. Friday has been turned over to police who are working on identifying the suspects. Police say if the table is returned in the interim no further police action would be taken. Anyone with any information on the incident should call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS.

Seat belt use up
■ Halton Regional Police Service reports a 96.4 per cent compliance rate for seat belt use during its annual seat belt campaign in April. That exceeds the 95 per cent target. During the campaign, 6,904 vehicles were checked and 170 were charged with seat belt offences. Eighty warnings on seat belt usage and proper use of child restraints were issued. The police service appreciates the public's co-operation during this successful campaign.

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A 'special' Olympic run

The Ontario Law Enforcement Torch Run for the Special Olympics made its way along Guelph Street in Georgetown Friday morning. Georgetown Village Constable Dennis Dimitroff (centre) led off carrying the torch, as members of various branches of the law enforcement field took turns passing the 'flame of hope'. The run was part of a province-wide 8,000 km run by 8,000 law enforcement officers in support of the Ontario Special Olympics, which will be held May 7 to 9 in Oakville.

Photo by Ted Brown

273 teaching assistants get pink slips

By **HERB GARBUTT**
Staff Writer

The Halton District School Board (HDSB) is laying off 139 instructional assistants and will not renew the contracts of 134 more. HDSB chair Ethel Gardiner, Halton Hills' trustee, said the notices were issued as the result of changes in the provincial government's education funding formula. Under the new formula, school boards must submit forms for each student with special needs to the ministry. The government then determines the level of need and issues grants to the boards. The board currently has 286 permanent instructional assistants, who provide support for children with special needs and assist teachers with large classes. The 134 are 'term-specific' assistants, whose contracts expire in June.

The Halton board has about 4,500 students identified as special needs individuals with conditions such as autism, Down's syndrome, eating disorders, behavioral problems and attention deficit disorder, who have varying physical, emotional and educational needs. Instructional assistants perform duties such as helping students with poor motor skills to cut, draw, print and write; they supervise troubled children on the playground; make sure kids in wheelchairs get around the school; help teachers; and help with washroom activities. Gardiner said the layoff notices were issued due to the uncertainty of the funding. She said the



ETHEL GARDINER

board does not expect to receive the grants until the end of the summer and doesn't know how much money they will get. "You can't run any system saying we're keeping on staff and we hope we get the \$4-5 million dollars to pay you," Gardiner said. "Undoubtedly some (instructional assistants) will be back for September but at this point we don't know how many." Gardiner said the special education formula should have been delayed or phased in over a year because the current situation leaves the board in an awkward position. "I don't know how we can be expected to efficiently and effectively plan programs to meet the needs of the special ed child until we know how much money we will have to do it." Irene McCauley, Halton Hills trustee for the Halton Catholic District School Board, said layoffs have not been discussed by her board.

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