

Halton finance committee approves 5.6% hike in police services budget

Continued from pg. 1

Though the budget appeared to skate through, it will have to stand up to a budget review committee before going to regional council for final approval.

Police Chief Ean Algar appeared before the committee to make a low-key pitch for approval of the budget, which received a stamp of approval from the police services board earlier in the year.

Cost-cutting measures have shaved expenses so that a full 83 per cent of the budget is being spent on personnel costs, said Algar.

"We've done a lot," he said. "We continue to do a lot."

Debt and building costs take up more than \$2 million each in the budget. Another \$2 million is slated for vehicles and other capital costs.

The 1999 budget has set aside funds for the hiring of 24 new officers through a Community Partnerships Program (CPP).

Under CPP, the province will temporarily pay half the salary of the new hires.

Despite this, a question mark will hang over the new hires until the results of an ongoing police review are known.

The \$92,000 review was launched in January to look into how Halton Regional Police do business. In particular, it is meant to investigate police staffing for-

mulas, known as the cop-to-pop calculations. In that formula, police officers are hired on a population basis. In other words, the more the region grows, the more officers are hired.

A recommendation against that

formula in the review could potentially put the new hires in jeopardy. Should the officers not be recommended, \$400,000 set aside for them would go towards Y2K financing instead.

—By Irene Gentle, special

Crime on the decline in Halton, chief tells finance committee

Halton Regional Police Chief Ean Algar arrived at a recent administration and finance committee meeting armed with statistics showing that Halton's crime clearance rate is above both the provincial and national averages.

Last year, Halton boasted a 43 per cent clearance, while Ontario and Canada had averages in the mid-30s.

Last year, Halton police answered 82,000 calls. While that number is down overall, more calls were logged in Burlington and Milton than in the previous year.

Halton calls were also up in the first quarter of this year. Much of that can be attributed to accidents in January of this year.

The 1998 record reports a dramatic drop in auto thefts, as well as break and enters. Property crimes

were also substantially reduced.

Overall crime was down, a trend which has continued in the first quarter of this year, said Algar.

Breaking the trend is violent crime, which saw a slight increase in first three months of 1999.

According to Statistics Canada, Halton won the gold medal as the safest community with a population above 100,000 in Canada.

"We're controlling crime quite well," said Algar.

The area does not fare quite as well when it comes to driving.

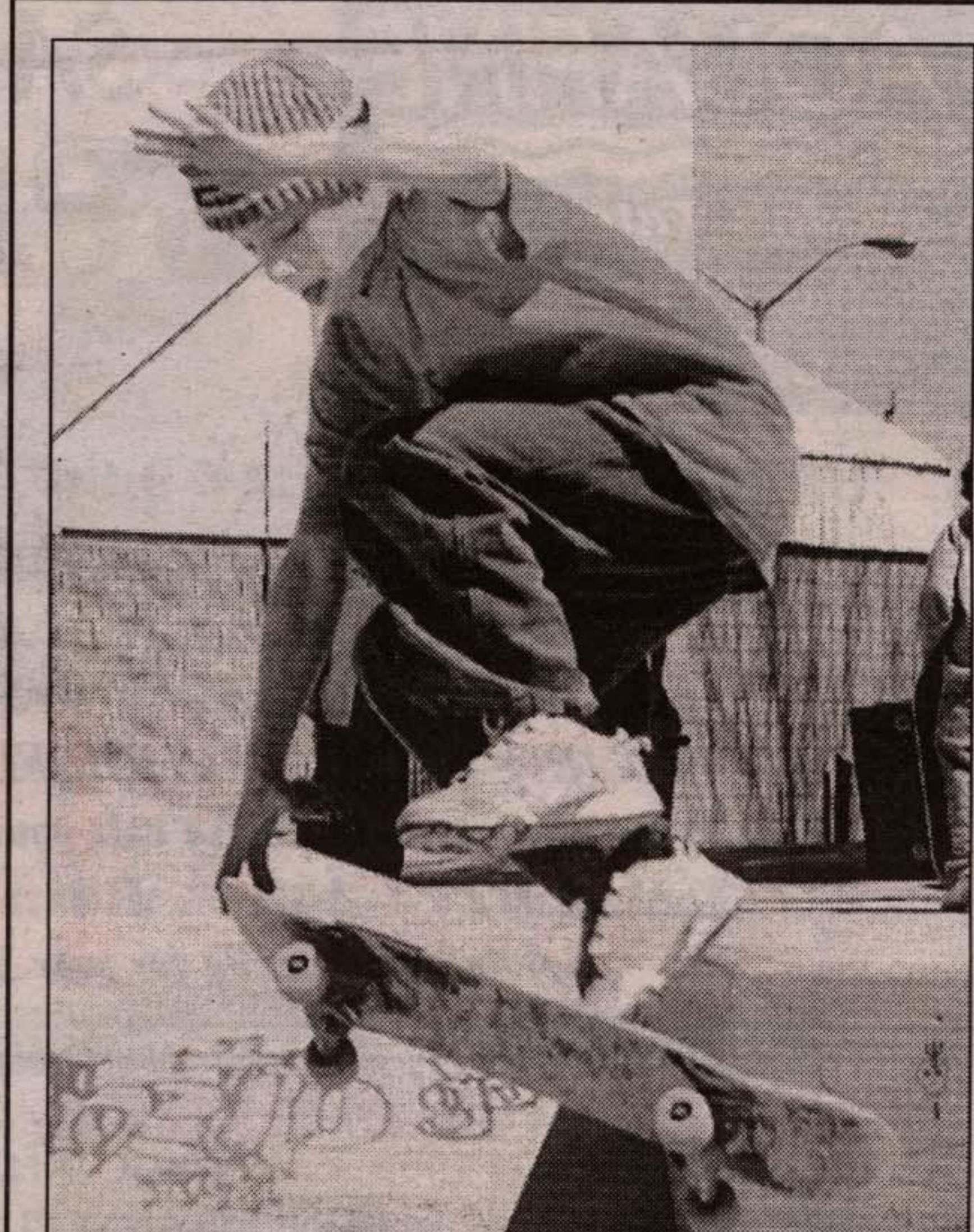
"Halton is higher than the Canadian average in traffic accidents," reported Algar. "That includes impaired driving."

Poor driving habits, not just traffic congestion and bad roads, are the cause, said Algar.

—By Irene Gentle, special



EAN ALGAR



Ready for lift-off

Nick Hamilton took advantage of a sunny day recently to hone his skateboarding skills at the new Georgetown skateboard park. The park will officially be opened May 1 at 11 a.m. For more information call Sherry Mitchell at 873-2601 ext. 275.

Photo by Ted Brown

School closure review will continue—trustee

A Burlington trustee believes a motion today (Wednesday) to postpone public school closure reviews for a year will be defeated.

Michael Ellis believes a secondary school review will continue despite a recommendation to delay all school closure talks until June 2000.

"I think we will go ahead once trustees' emotions settle down," he said. "I think it would be silly not to look at it. There are different factors involved with secondary schools."

Ellis said he understands the disappointment of some trustees after the Halton District School Board recently voted against closing three south schools.

Some trustees feel closures are needed to build new schools in growth areas. Boards must eliminate large surplus capacities to obtain provincial funding for new schools.

Oakville Trustee Debbie Marklew, who made the postponement motion, feels it's worthless to review secondary accommodation if the board won't consider closing schools.

"Staff spent a lot of time on recommendations and we decided not to close any elementary schools," she said. "So why upset a whole pile of people again?"

Marklew said she'll interpret a vote against postponement as a sign the board is willing to close secondary schools.

The trustee, who is chair of the secondary accommodation committee, said she'll resign from it if there's a tie vote on postponement. (Two of the three recent recommendations to close elementary schools lost on tie votes).

"I need to be in my advocate role more," she said. "I've had no time for community meetings and I'm not going to do this anymore."

The secondary school accommodation committee has been formed to develop recommendations by November concerning consolidation and closure of secondary schools in south Burlington and south Oakville. The suggested goal is to eliminate 3,200 spaces the board's estimated excess secondary capacity.

—By Dennis Smith, special

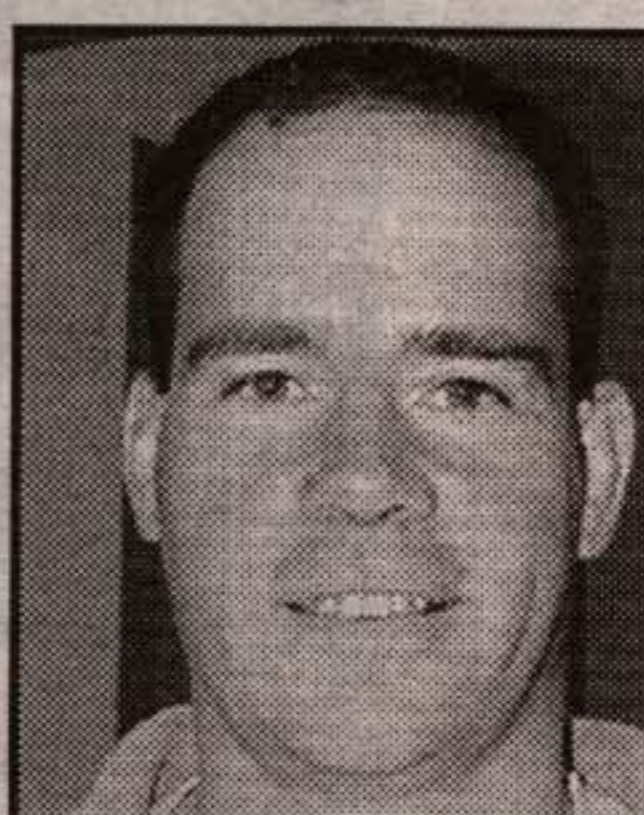
What You Said

'Do you think Wayne Gretzky retired at the right time?'



Chris Noonan, student, Georgetown

"Yes I do. He has come to a point in his career when he's getting on in years, so I think it was smart for him to quit while he's ahead."



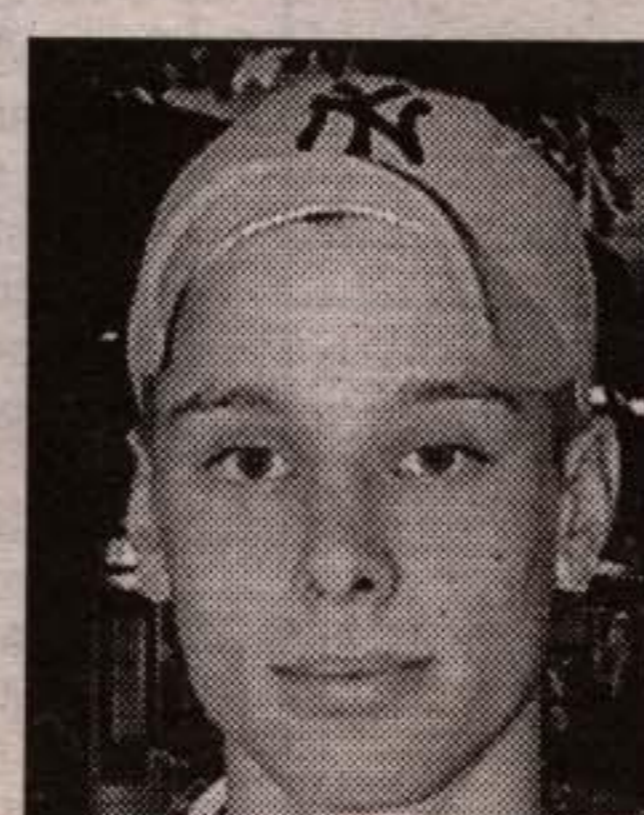
Scott Brydie, student, Georgetown

"Yeah, I really think so. He talked about the sport being physically demanding, and his family is getting to an age where they need him around. It's time to realize his commitment to his family."



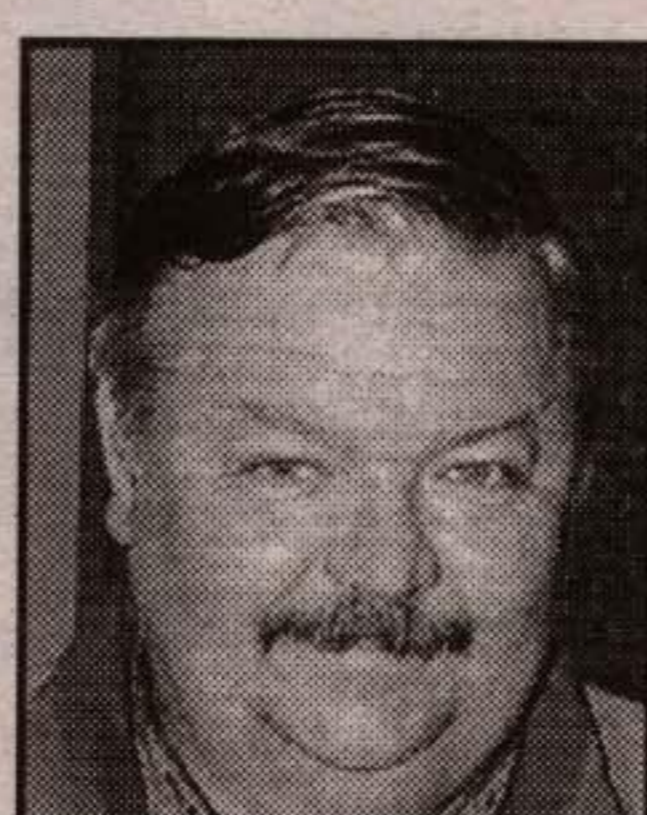
Doris Correia, consultant, Georgetown

"Yes, definitely. He's worked very hard to better the sport all his life, and he deserves to enjoy the fruits of his labors. He has children and wants to spend time with them."



Bob Sanders, student, Georgetown

"I do. He's getting older, in terms of hockey players, so he should quit while he's still a great player, and ahead of the game."



Al Avery, coffee truck driver, Georgetown

"Yes, by all means. He can still perform like the superstar he is, and if he waited, he'd become a 'sub-par' Wayne Gretzky if he played longer. He made the right decision."

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