

Fair board fears end is near for fall fair

Georgetown Agricultural Society (GAS) is finally talking and has told Halton Hills council that its March decision to allow Kinsmen Girls Softball League to play at the Fairgrounds on fair weekend will put the fair in jeopardy.

Traditionally both GAS and the ball club have shared the Fairgrounds during fair weekend—the second weekend in September. The two organizations reached an impasse in negotiations to settle sharing issues and the town—put in the middle—was forced to make a decision. An original staff decision gave GAS exclusive rights to the park during fair weekend but that was overturned by council in March and the ball club was given four diamonds to use for their day of champs on fair weekend.

GAS was silent on the issue during the council deliberations.

However council's decision has sent GAS and this year's fair into turmoil, say four GAS spokespersons at a recent council meeting.

GAS will not be able to set up its education tent now that its location has been given to the ball club, and has already cancelled its school program for more than 400 children, which is held in the tent. GAS maintained its insistence the education tent cannot be simply moved, as the Kinsmen ball

club suggested, to any other location because it requires security, lighting, water and hydro, and fire access. It could face flooding in another location, said Austin Carpenter, GAS secretary-treasurer.

GAS vice-president Barb Wanless said her group must shoulder part of the blame for the crisis citing their failure to communicate the importance of the fair, and the critical issues they face in putting it on each year. She added GAS failed to communicate how much the fair board depends on gate revenues and that free passes to Kinsmen ball players and one family member amounts to almost \$4,000 annually in lost gate revenues. She added the loss of the school program will seriously affect revenues from sponsorships as well as thousands of dollars from key attractions due to the use of the diamonds by the ball club.

Carpenter said the fair board has already spent most of its reserve fund

committing to attractions, and if the fair gets rained out this year, it could mean the end of the organization.

"We are personally saddened and dispirited that this situation has gone so far and we know our own silence is partly to blame," said Wanless. "We should have taken more time to communicate how the growth of our fair will impact on the ball games and how important the safety issue has been from the outset. We must ensure we do not allow such a vacuum to occur again."

Wanless said talks should begin again with new faces around the bargaining table.

While Kinsmen Club president Dan Breznicar endorsed Wanless' suggestion of new faces, he said his organization still supported council's decision. Jim Ford, commissioner of the Kinsmen Girls Softball League, was on the agenda to speak, but chose not to respond.

Jeff Nurse, GAS past president, said GAS is locked into the second weekend of September due to surrounding fairs and the CNE. He said the original staff decision was based on common sense.

Nurse, however, did say GAS is willing to discuss a change in location for the fair. That aspect has not been discussed before.

Council took no action on GAS's presentations.

'We are personally saddened and dispirited that this situation has gone so far and we know our own silence is partly to blame.'

**—Barb Wanless
GAS v.p.**

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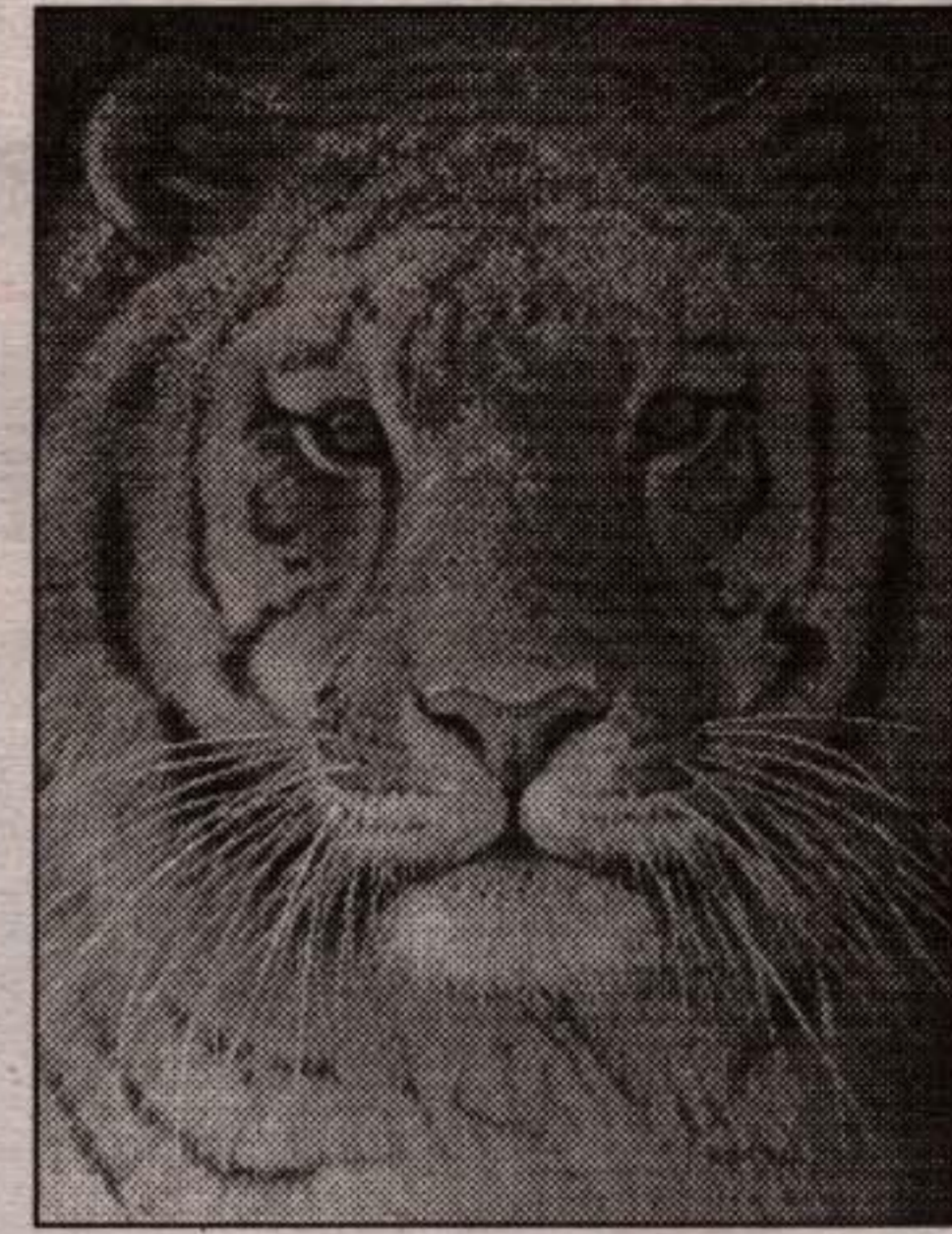
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