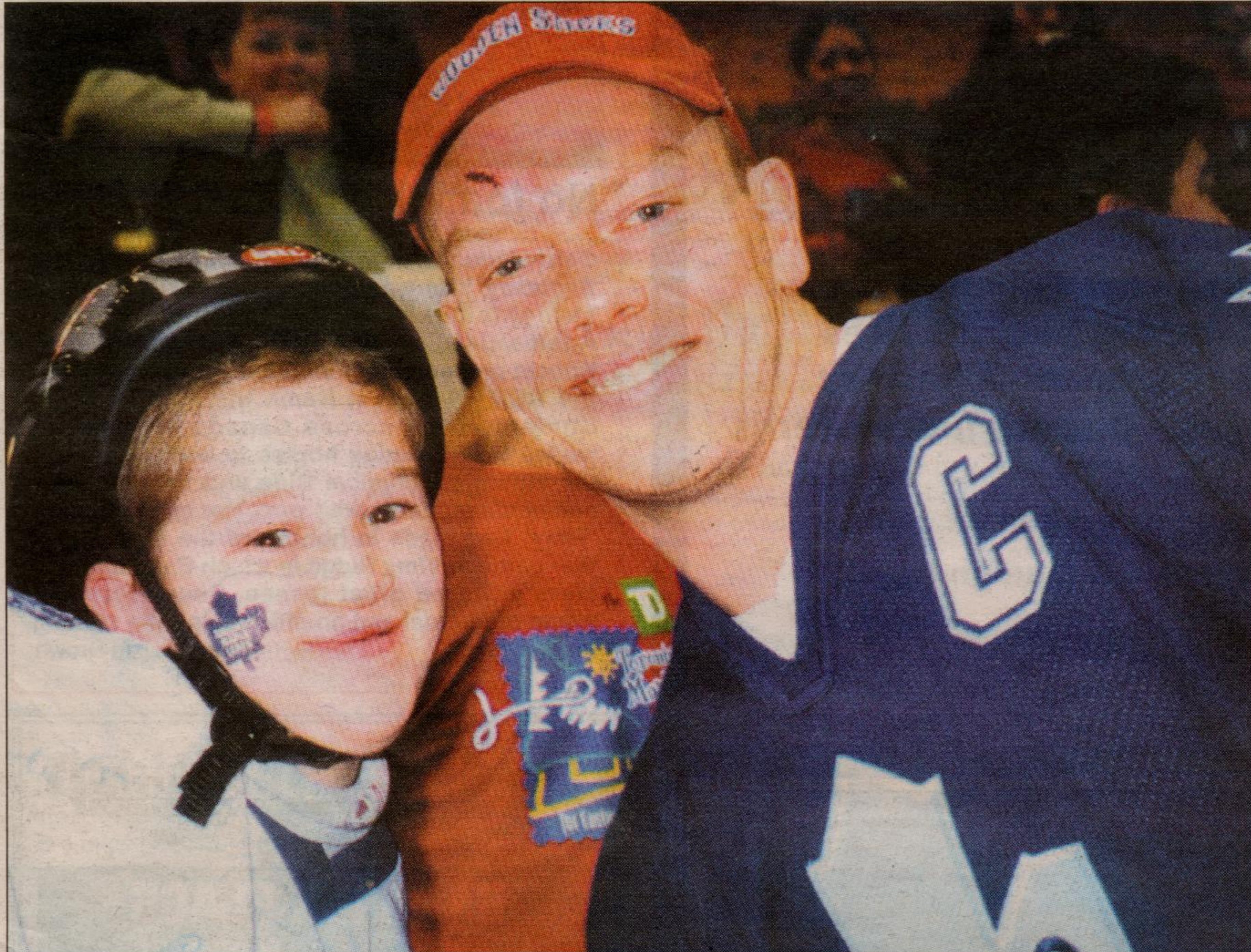


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Toronto Maple Leaf centre Mats Sundin may not be Joseph Curtis Leben's favourite player (that honour goes to Curtis Joseph) but the Georgetown youngster was thrilled to meet the

Leaf captain just the same at Saturday's TD Easter Seals Skate. Leben raised more than \$5,000 on his own this year.

Photo courtesy Debbie Leben

And meets hockey idol

Youngster raises \$5,147 for Easter Seals

Georgetown fan Joseph Curtis finally got his wish to meet his hockey idol Curtis Joseph.

Joseph (Joey) Curtis Leben was on a mission this year to meet his almost-namesake Curtis (Cujo) Joseph. As Saturday's TD Toronto Maple Leaf Easter Seals Skate for Handicapped Children approached, Joey decided he wanted to do something special this year.

Participants must raise \$700 in pledges to take part in the skate with the Leafs. In the previous three years, Joey had raised as much as \$2,000 but had shared his pledges with others so that they could par-

ticipate as well.

This year with the help of his mom, Debbie, Joey organized a draw for an autographed Leaf sweater and team-autographed stick and raised \$5,147. He was one of just two participants to top the \$5,000 mark.

Joey met Leaf players Mats Sundin, Mikael Renberg and Bryan McCabe. His favourite player, Curtis Joseph, wasn't scheduled to appear until a later skate, though. However, because he had done such an excellent job fund-raising, the Leaf goaltender came out to meet Joey.

"He was so excited," Debbie said.

"Cujo looked at him and said, 'Hey, that's my stick.'"

Joseph had given Joey his stick prior to a game last year but only met him very briefly. Saturday, Joey had the chance to meet Joseph and get his autograph on the stick.

Joey's fund-raising also made him a bit of a celebrity. He was interviewed twice for TV and a copy of the article from *The Independent & Free Press* about Joey's campaign was posted at the skate.

The only sad note was that the three photos Debbie snapped of Joey with the Leaf goalie didn't turn out.

—By Herb Garbutt, staff writer

Teacher payout blamed for school board budget shortfall

Teacher retirement gratuities at the Halton District School Board are being blamed for most of a \$2.2-million budget shortfall.

The board's business superintendent, Carla Kisko, recommended at Wednesday's board meeting that trustees use reserves to cover what she said is a \$2.2-million operating budget deficit for 2000-01.

The staff report puts emphasis on teacher retirement gratuities as the main factor in the shortfall.

Gratuities are part of teachers' negotiated agreements and have been offered at the Halton board for at least 30 years, explained Education Director Dusty Papke. They constitute a lump-sum payment on retirement.

The payout is calculated by taking the number of sick days a teacher has saved over his or her career and determining the value up to 50 per cent of one year's salary.

A teacher is permitted 20 sick days over 10 months. Those that are unused are banked and carried over to the next school year. The average payout would be in the \$30,000 range for a longtime teacher. About 150 teachers retired last year.

The public board had budgeted for \$278.3 million in total expenditures for the last school year, but the tally was \$294.1 million. After a funding offset of \$9.5 million from education development charges, grants and proceeds from the sale of a Burlington school, that still leaves \$2.2 million of red ink.

If the reserve fund is used to cover the shortfall, it will leave just \$43,728 in that account.

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