

Town left to ponder low voter turnout

A hotly-contested mayoral race still couldn't bring the voters out to the polls Monday—as the turnout was officially set at 33 per cent.

Only 12,637 of 38,566 eligible voters cast ballots, with the highest turnout in Acton (35 per cent), followed by Ward 4 (34 per cent) and Ward 3 (32 per cent). In Ward 2, where Councillors Bryan Lewis and Joan Robson were acclaimed, only 29 per cent of the voters came out. In 2000, the overall voter turnout was 39 per cent.

Even though the voter turnout was lower, town clerk Karen Landry, who is in charge of the municipal elections, said this year's number is based for the first time on an up-to-date electronic list. In past elections, the official number was based on a preliminary elector list. That would account in a lower turnout figure by a couple percentage points than previous years, she said. Using the 2003 preliminary list (with about 2,000 fewer eligible voters) number, the turnout figure climbs to 34.47 per cent compared to the 2000's 39 per cent.

She pointed out the Ward 2 acclamations also likely affected the overall turnout figure.

Town staff had been trying to attract a higher turnout percentage through information kiosks and voter notification cards delivered as flyers through the newspaper, rather than the traditional mailed voter postcard. But some candidates claimed this experiment didn't work and many received calls on election day from voters asking for the location of their polling place.

"I sent a note to the town three weeks ago," said mayoral candidate Marilyn Serjeantson Monday night. "I noticed right away there was a problem.... There was lots of notification, but people expected to get a card (through the mail), but didn't. Even (Monday) people were asking me at 6:30 p.m. where to vote. ...I expected a 50 per cent voter turnout...

(33 per cent) that's shocking."

"I think we actually made an excellent effort in terms of getting the message out there about the election through the various venues," said Landry. "Starting off with the fairs, visiting residential buildings that have over 100 electors, being at the Georgetown mall, advertising on our signage and in the newspapers. We also sent flyers through the school board. So we really did send the message home.

"I think what we will look at (next time) is a combination of both (flyers and cards)," she said. "Like any other municipality we are doing our best to increase that voter turnout."

Victorious candidates such as Mike Davis in Ward 3 and Ron Chatten in Ward 4, who also received calls Monday, both agreed the notification process is something that can be reviewed by the new council.

...

Official 2003 election results including poll-by-poll results are now available.

Analysis shows that Mayor-elect Rick Bonnette won all Ward 1 (Acton) polls by margins ranging from 50 to more than 100 votes—including the advance polls. He also won most of the Ward 2 polls and kept pace with runner-up John Day, a winner in most of the Wards 3 and 4 polls. However, Day's margin of victory (10-30 votes) in Wards 3 and 4 polls (his home wards) was considerably less than what Bonnette received in his home wards.

Day and third-place finisher Kathy Gastle split most of the remaining votes in Acton and Esquesing (Ward 2). Gastle, who won only three of the 93 polls, placed a consistent third in Wards 3 and 4 where she traded voters with challenger Marilyn Serjeantson, who ran fourth in most of the polls.

Bonnette received 5,035 votes, Day 4,022, Gastle 2,206 and Serjeantson 1,295.

—By Cynthia Gamble, staff writer

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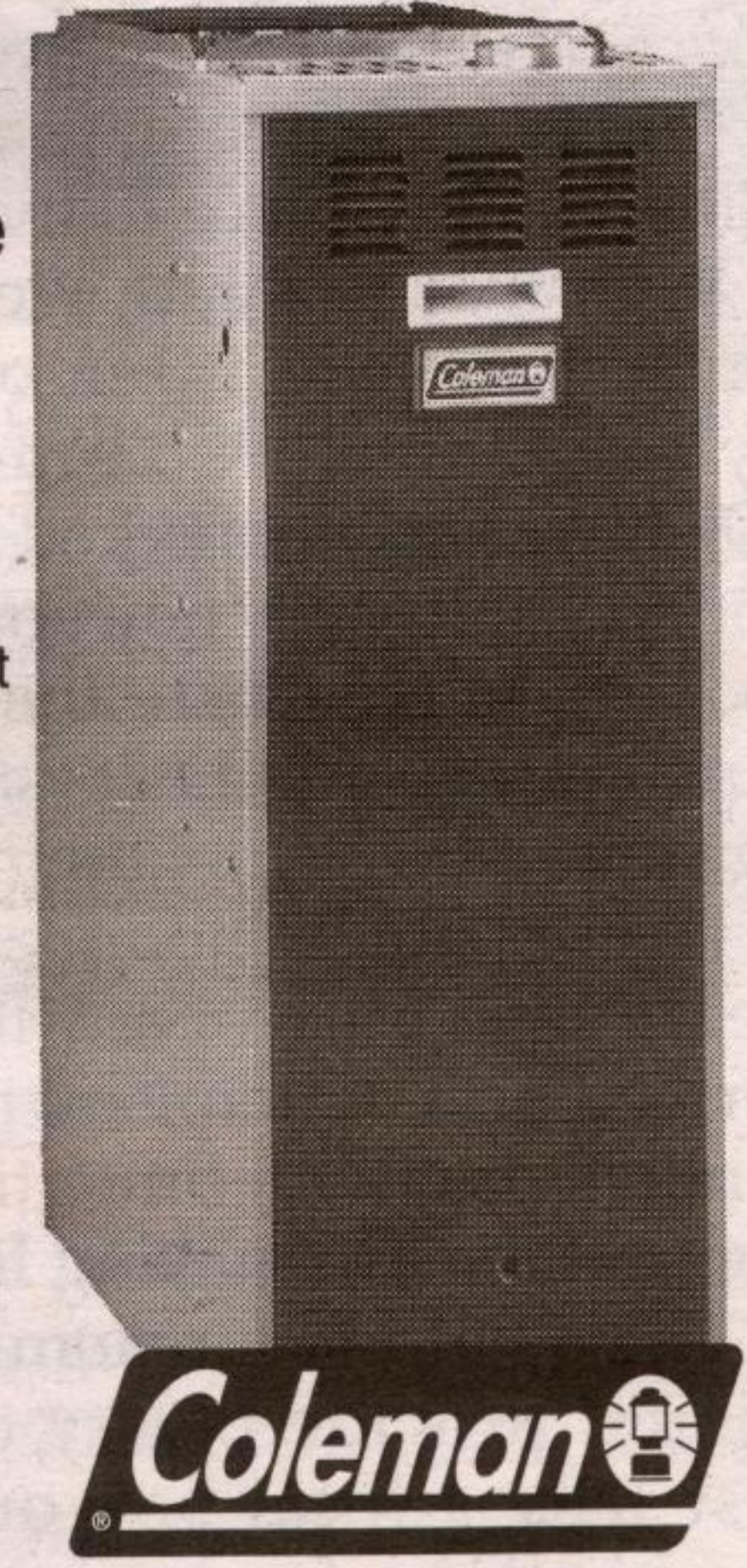
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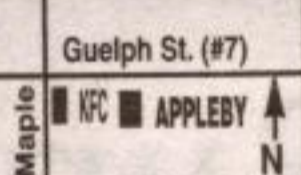
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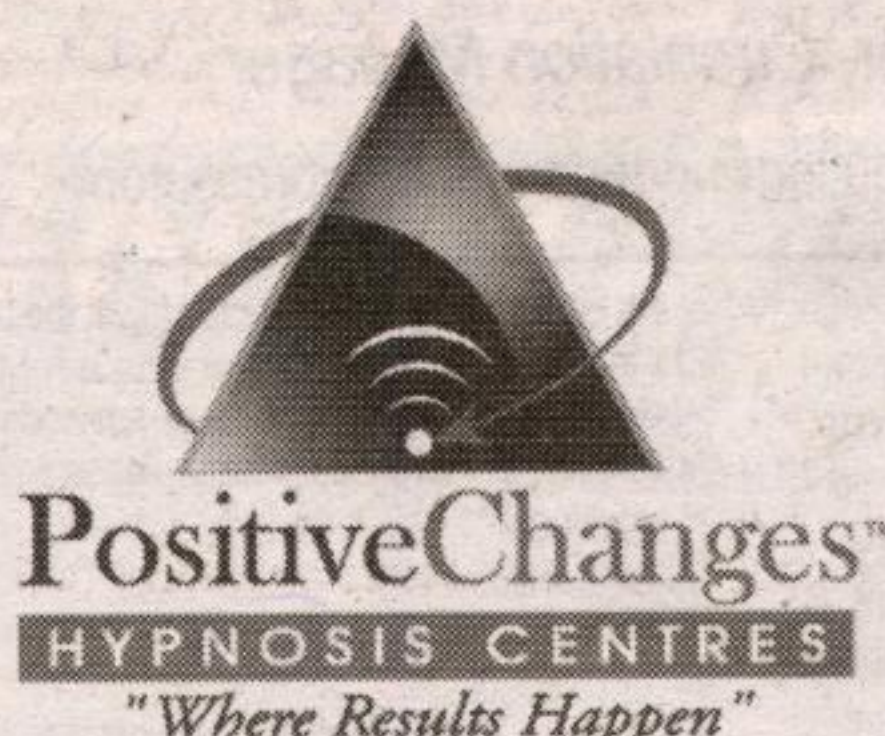
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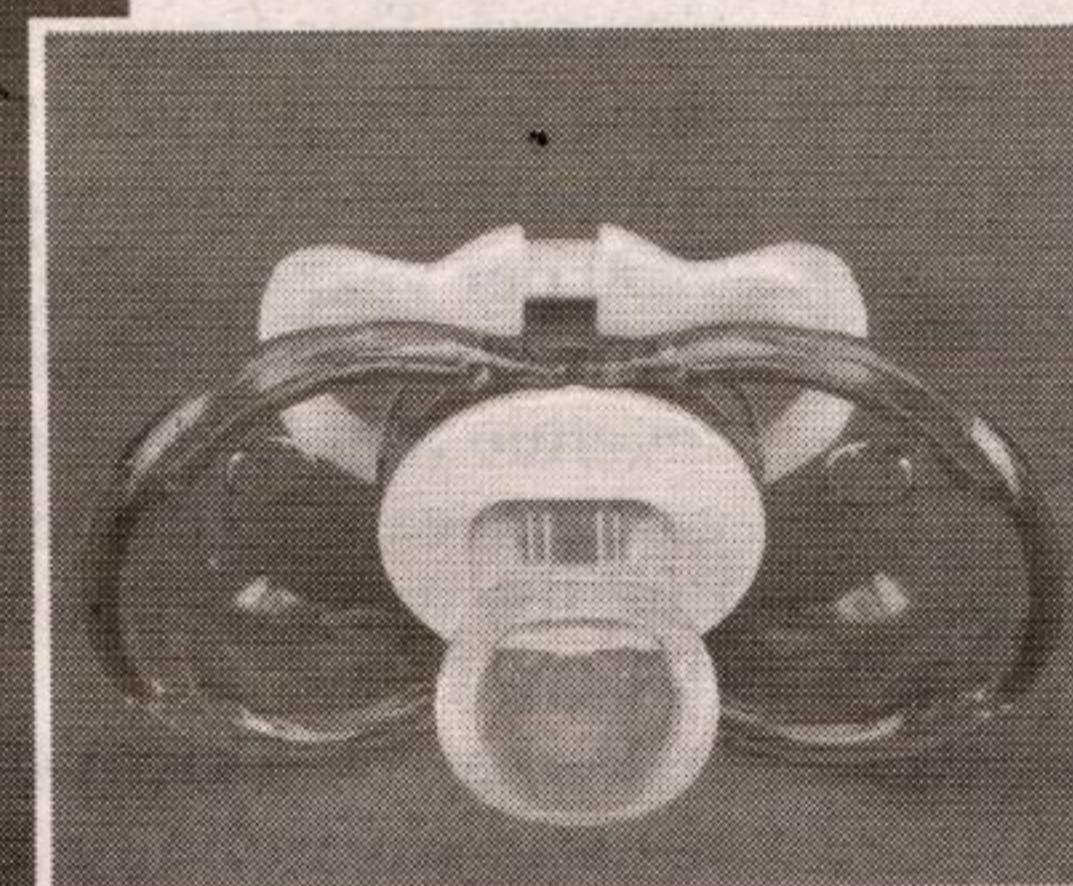


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