



Dog day afternoon

The first Dog Day in the Park Saturday was an "awesome" day, said HH-Dog organizer Cyndi Knill with more than 200 dog owners and their pooches turning out to check out the town's first leash-free zone in Prospect Park. The volunteer-based group, which maintains the zone, signed up about 30 new members. Here, Liny Lamberink tries unsuccessfully to get Erina to sit. Photo by Yves Desjardins



Invention Convention

St Francis of Assisi Grade 8 students Samantha Donaghy and Alannah McCornville, both 13, displayed their "No Big Birds Allowed" weight-sensitive bird feeder which sets off an alarm if large birds land on it, to save the bird seed for smaller species. The invention was one of 96 Grade 7-8 students at the school created for an Invention Convention at the school. The convention was a preview for their exhibits which were displayed at BCE Place in Toronto, to be assessed by staff at that location. The event was coordinated by the Learning Partnership, a not-for-profit organization that brings together business, government, community and education together to educate. Photo by Ted Brown

Busy intersection gets additional guard

Halton Hills council approved the emergency hiring of a second crossing guard for one hour a day at the intersection of Eaton St. and Miller Dr.

Ward 4 Councillors Ron Chatten and Bob Inglis requested the addition due to high volume of pedestrian and vehicle traffic resulting from

the three elementary schools in the immediate area.

Chatten said Halton Police have promised increased enforcement due to vehicles both ignoring the stops signs and the overwhelmed crossing guard's signal.

Total cost is estimated at \$350 to \$400.

'Town must fight for hospital,' doctors plead to councillors

The only thing that stands between the closure of the obstetrics/pediatrics unit at Georgetown hospital is the community.

That was the summation of three Georgetown doctors, who made a plea Monday night to Halton Hills council—and the community—to fight the decision by William Osler Health Centre (WOHC) to close the obstetrics, neo-natal and pediatrics unit at the Georgetown campus of the WOHC on July 5.

Dr. Jeff Sutherland, Dr. Debbie Zeni and Dr. Craig Carson all predicted the eventual reduction of the Georgetown hospital to an out-patient/rehabilitation facility for residents of Etobicoke and Brampton—with all elements of an acute care hospital removed to Brampton and Etobicoke campuses of WOHC.

If that happens they will be resigning their hospital privileges, they say.

"I don't think this is doomsday talk, I think there is a very good chance that all these issues can happen in Georgetown," said Sutherland, Georgetown's site chief of family practice and a former WOHC board member. He said the town and its residents don't have enough input in how their hospital is run.

Carson also predicted it could mean a loss of the doctors in the community and a harder time for the community to recruit new ones.

"As a community we must move to stop any further erosion of our services at Georgetown, if we wish to continue attract more doctors and to provide the competent medical services our citizens need and deserve," said Carson.

In his four years as a doctor in Georgetown, he said he has seen a steady decline of services, with long waits for patients forced to be transferred to other hospitals and to other doctors there willing to accept them.

"That extra drive down the road could mean the difference between recovery and (getting) back to work in a short time or permanent disability."

Zeni had even more dire predictions. She said recent studies on pregnant women who had to travel distances to have their babies revealed more premature births, deaths and greater health care costs resulting from more babies with lifetime birthing difficulties such as cerebral palsy, blindness or deafness.

The board of directors should respect the needs of babies and women, but the decision to close obstetrics and pediatrics shows they don't, said Zeni, a 20-year doctor in the community.

A letter sent by the Georgetown group of family physicians to WOHC senior management and the board of directors 10 days ago still has not been acknowledged.

WOHC senior management considers the closure a done deal and "if it's going to be undone, it's going to be up to us," said Zeni.

"Our community needs to work hard to reclaim our services."

The doctors recommended councillors and residents should call or write letters to all WOHC board of directors, to Ontario Minister of Health and Long-Term Care George Smitherman, the ministry's deputy minister Philip Hassen and that Mayor Rick Bonnette make deputations to both the WOHC board and to Smitherman.

Bonnette told the doctors he already has a meeting lined up with WOHC CEO Bob Bell this week and is trying to set up a meeting with Smitherman.

Council backed the mayor with an unanimous resolution to request WOHC to reconsider its decision to close

the obstetrics/pediatrics wing of the hospital and that the ministry provide funding to allow this happen. Besides WOHC and Smitherman, this resolution is being sent to Premier Dalton McGuinty, MPP Ted Chudleigh, MP Julian Reed, Oakville Liberal MPP Kevin Flynn (a longtime colleague of Bonnette's and the only Liberal MPP in Halton) as well as other MPPs in the WOHC jurisdiction. Councillor Moya Johnson, who works for the Child Health Network, partly funded by WOHC, declared a conflict of interest.

Councillor Jane Fogal wondered whether WOHC has tried to increase the number of births at the Georgetown campus by redirecting Brampton women there.

Zeni said no, adding the WOHC made no attempt to consult with the doctors, legitimize costs or request staff suggestions to become more efficient. However, she noted that in an efficiency rating, Georgetown hospital ranked better than the provincial average.

"It is frustrating that our quality of life is being challenged and we, as a community, have to step up," said Bonnette. "This isn't just a Georgetown issue; this is a Halton Hills issue. This affects everyone."

As a longtime member of the Halton Region physician recruitment committee, Bonnette agreed this would make the search for new doctors more difficult. But there's also an economic factor as well—the lack of a full-service hospital will compound the difficulty to attract new businesses when told their employees can't have their babies born here.

Acton Councillor Mike O'Leary stressed the importance of a community grassroots movement of phone calls and letters. He said a pollster once said one phone call is equal to 10 votes and one letter to 100 votes.

Fogal was even more militant. Upset by the insensitivity of the WOHC senior management and the board of directors about local community needs, she said. "If anything, let's de-amalgamate. Let's get our hospital back!"

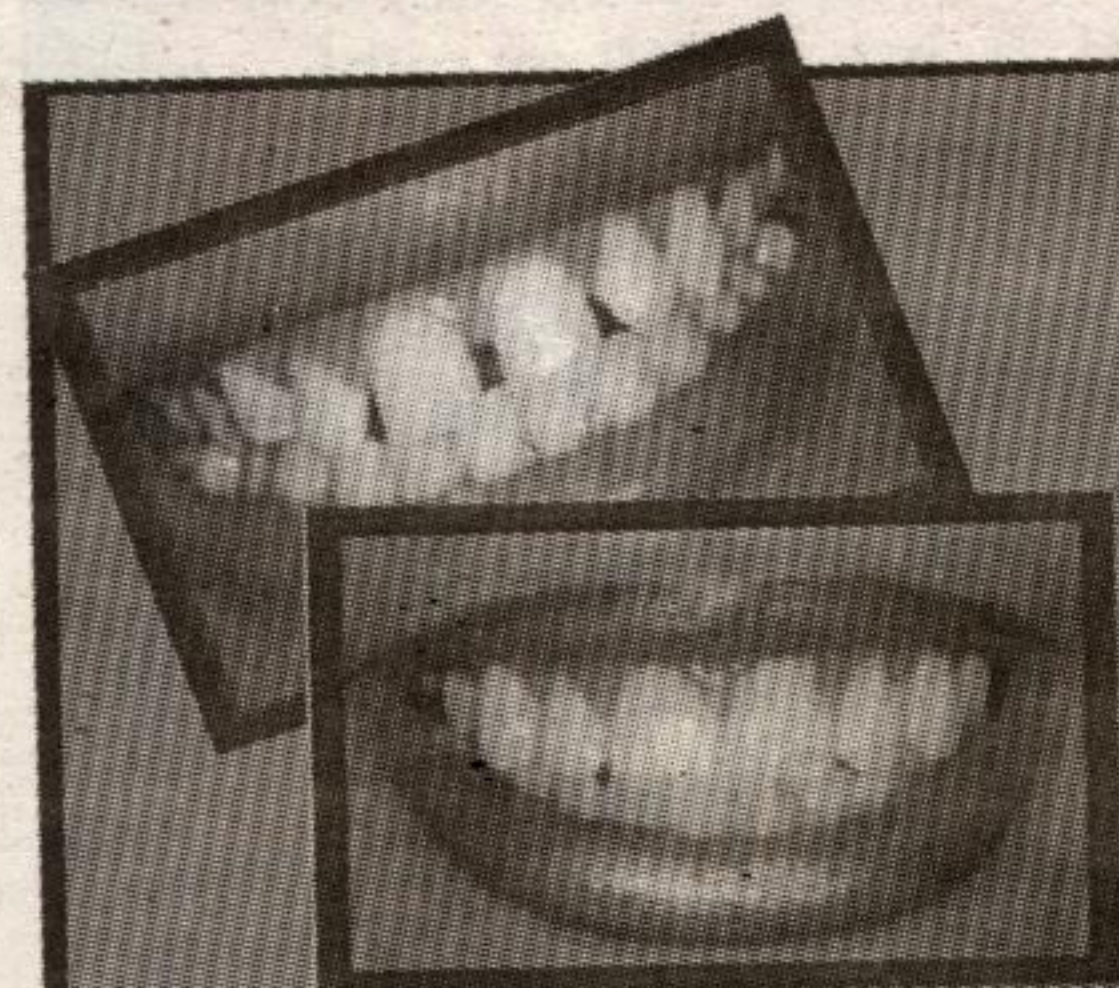
The public gallery filled with medical personnel cheered.

—By Cynthia Gamble, staff writer

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