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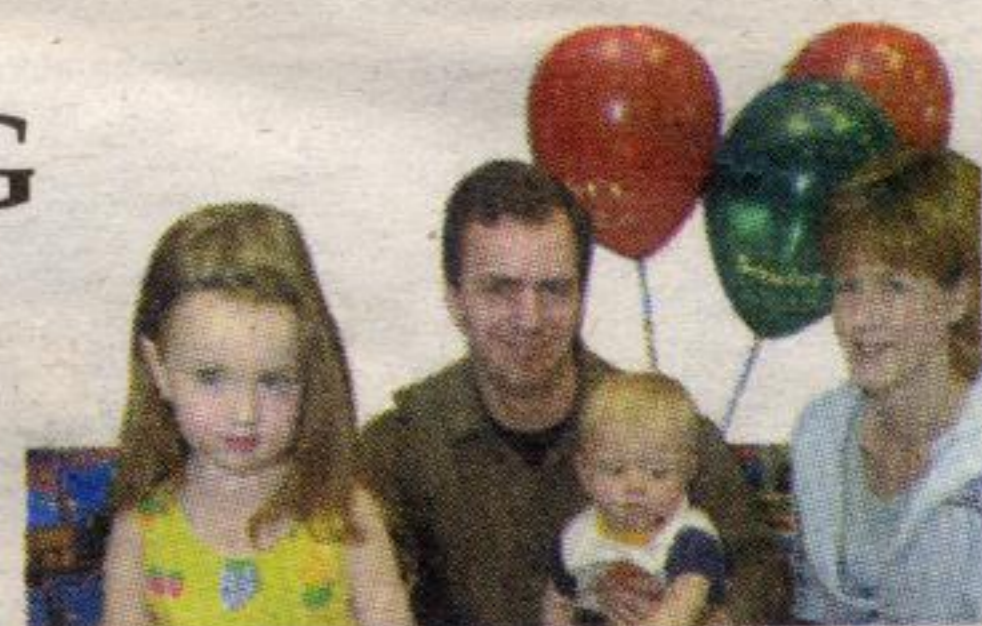
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'Thanks for coming'

Hospital chair tells mayor, residents board will 'discuss' OB closure plan

Halton Hills residents didn't get the brush-off from William Osler Health Centre officials Thursday, but they also didn't get the answer they were looking for.

Although the chairman of the William Osler Health Centre (WOHC) board of directors said there would be some "in-camera" discussion on Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette's request to reconsider WOHC's move to close obstetrics at Georgetown hospital in July, he didn't give much hope the board would reverse its decision.

"We made a very considered decision," said chair Bryan Held, after Bonnette's impassioned plea to WOHC's board Thursday afternoon to

maintain obstetrics and pediatrics at the Georgetown campus, backed up by 120 area residents, most who came in town-provided buses to the board meeting at WOHC's Etobicoke campus.

"This decision has been made, and we would like to continue working in partnership with you. We are putting other services into Georgetown," said Held.



BRYAN HELD

"I do not want to debate this with you in front of a partisan crowd," said Held, to a chorus of groans from the audience after Bonnette reiterated his request to at least have a two-year moratorium on removal of the services so the town and hospital board can work together to put pressure on the Ministry of Health for funding.



Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette shows William Osler Health Centre board members a bag containing more than 3,500 ballots from *The Independent & Free Press*' Keep Our Hospital's OB Ward Open! campaign. The

mayor asked board officials to rethink their decision to close the Georgetown hospital's OB ward July 5. The ballots were collected in only nine days and the campaign continues until June 4. Photo by Ted Brown

Held then said the board "believes strongly in the effectiveness of clinical care," that they looked forward to working with the Halton Hills community, then told the audience that "this part of the meeting is over."

In his presentation to the board, Bonnette held up a bag full of more than 3,500 ballots sent into *The Independent & Free Press* from residents urging the health centre to keep the OB ward open in Georgetown and stressed "it is outrageous this decision was made without any public consultation."

"Before the merger of the three hospitals, Georgetown hospital never operated from a deficit position," said Bonnette. "Those who are to blame for the deficit should bear the burden of the service cuts," he added to a boister-

ous round of applause, just one of many from the audience, that included nurses and volunteers from the Georgetown hospital.

Wellington-Halton Hills federal election candidates Bruce Hood (Liberal) and Mike Chong (Conservative) also attended the meeting.

WOHC CEO Bob Bell said earlier that WOHC was permanently consolidating Georgetown's obstetrics and pediatrics wards to the Brampton campus as a first step in trying to achieve a balanced budget over the next two years, in light of the health centre's \$27-million operating deficit.

Bonnette asked how WOHC "can claim there is an unacceptable health risk" in Georgetown's obstetrics department "when statistics show otherwise."

He also quoted from a letter written in 2002 from WOHC's chair of directors to physicians and hospital staff praising them for "excellent obstetrical services that you currently provide," and assuring them the board is "fully committed to the (obstetrics) program's continu-

ance."

Wards 3 and 4 Regional Councillor Jane Fogal also pleaded with the board to ensure William Osler's Georgetown campus remains a "full hospital."

"I don't understand why we have to travel distances when we used to have a hospital that functioned and gave us everything we needed," said Fogal, who added she questioned the "whole model" the board was working from.

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