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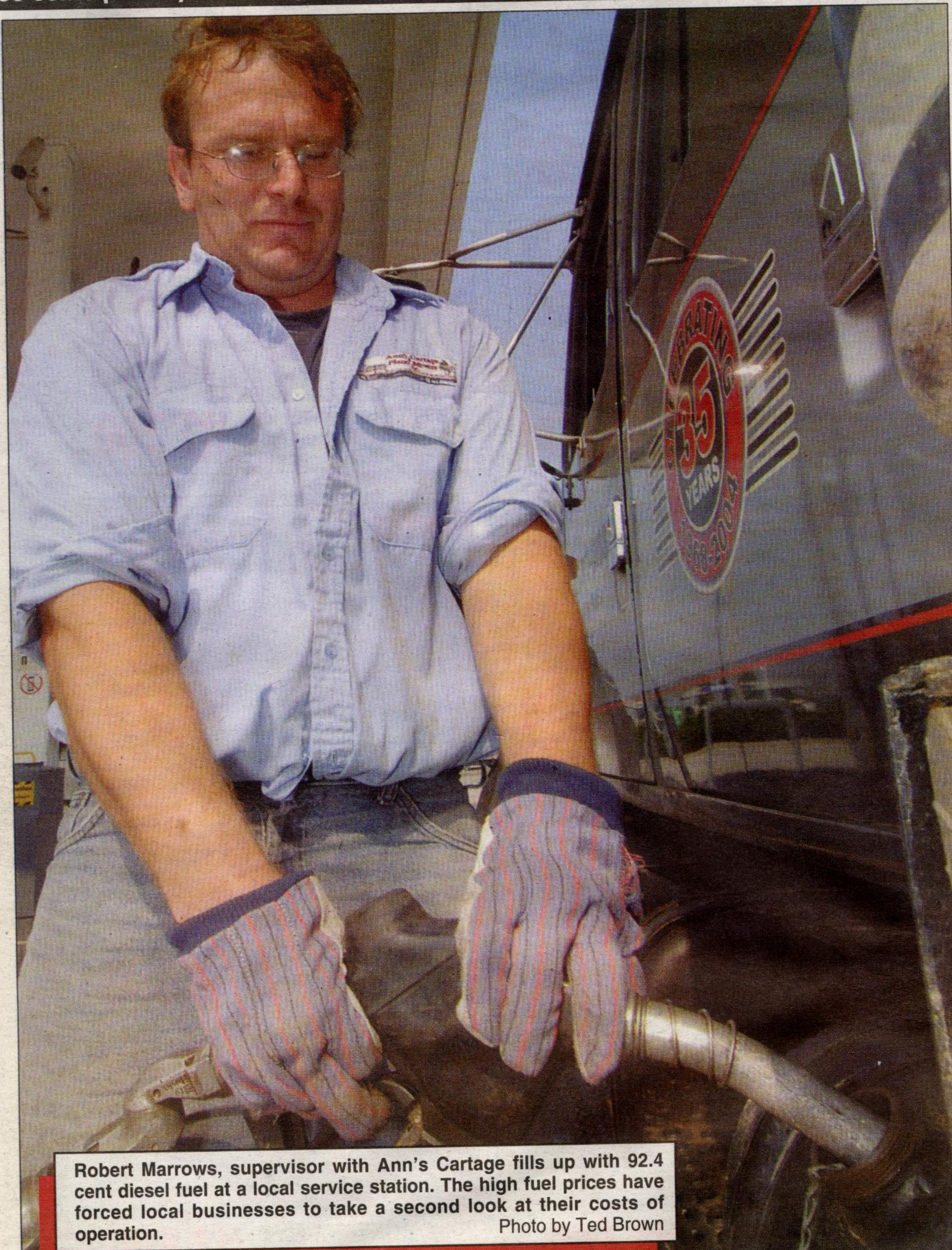
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High gas prices pinch firms' bottom lines

While drivers are feeling the pinch at the gas pump, nobody is being hit harder than those who make their living on the road.

Peter Marrows of Ann's Cartage and Piano Movers said his company has always worked on an hourly rate. That means every time fuel prices rise, it negatively affects the company's bottom line.

"We had one move to Ottawa that was booked two months ago. Now we're looking at 25 per cent increase for fuel. That's huge. We're a small company that relies on its reputation. I can't go back to customers and tell them it's going to cost them more."

Marrows said he has been reluctant to add a fuel surcharge because jobs are booked and quoted in advance and he doesn't want to be charging customers unnecessarily if prices drop.

However, increasing the hourly rate has become a consideration when booking new jobs.

"If it's already booked or if it's local—Mississauga, Brampton—we're not going to charge more but for new clientele it has to be a consideration if we're going long distances."

Fred's Towing has seen its fuel expenses rise from \$2,200 in May to \$3,300 in August. Owner Rob Arsenaault resisted raising fees until gas broke the \$1 per litre mark.

"Our view was that it would come back down so we'd just bite the bullet," he said. "But when it went screaming over a dollar we had to increase to cover our costs."

Robert Noble Septic Tank Pumping is facing similar increases in fuel for its two trucks. With regular trips to waste treatment facilities in Hamilton and Collingwood, they were spending approximately \$4,000 a month on fuel before prices rose sharply.

"We could raise prices but the customers don't want to pay it," said Anita McEnery. "There are so many others (companies) competing, we don't want to put on any more costs than we have to."

They have tried to compensate with scheduling, trying to make sure the truck is full before heading to the treatment facilities.

Rick Wood of E-Z Taxi said he's had a couple of drivers who have considered giving up their job

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Robert Marrows, supervisor with Ann's Cartage fills up with 92.4 cent diesel fuel at a local service station. The high fuel prices have forced local businesses to take a second look at their costs of operation.
 Photo by Ted Brown

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