

Drunk driver blamed in death of Rockwood couple

LISA TALLYN
Staff Writer

A Rockwood couple is dead after their vehicle was rammed from behind by another car and pushed into the path of an oncoming GO train in Milton Thursday evening.

The couple's vehicle was struck a short time later by a westbound train.

Andrew and Henrietta Miller, 66 and 65, were pronounced dead at the scene.

The collision occurred at about 7:20 p.m. at the level crossing on Trafalgar Rd. north of Derry Rd.

The driver of the Mercedes accused of failing to stop at the crossing and pushing the couple's car onto the tracks has been charged with impaired driving causing death.

He is facing previous charges of impaired driving and failing to provide a breath sample in Peel Region laid last year.

After the initial collision, the southbound Mercedes skidded across the tracks, hitting a northbound car driven by a Milton woman, who wasn't injured.

The driver of the Mercedes suffered non-life threatening injuries.

Milton resident Kelly Spinelli who was stopped behind the northbound car struck by the Mercedes watched in horror as the accident unfolded.

"(After hitting the northbound car) he



Emergency personnel examine the wreckage of a car that was struck by a westbound GO train in Milton Thursday after it was rear-ended and pushed onto the tracks. A Rockwood couple was killed. A Milton man is facing two counts of impaired driving causing death.

Photo by David Ritchie

(the Mercedes driver) opened the car door, stumbled out...He looked like he was about to fall over. He was screaming, 'I need my mom'."

Then Spinelli realized nobody was getting out of the car on the tracks.

"As I was thinking this, the horn (of the train) blared and it (the impact) sent the car flying into a pole," she said. "I was

screaming and dialing 911— I think the only thing I could come up with was the word 'train'."

She said a man who had been following the Mercedes prior to the crash— police had received reports from motorists of an erratic driver in the area— was shouting at the driver and had to be restrained.

No one was injured on the GO train.

A small dog in the Millers' vehicle was critically injured and had to be euthanized.

The site of the tragedy is now marked by a homemade cross bearing a grieving child's message to his Nana and Grampa: "We will miss you forever. We will love you forever."

On it are some toy cars and a photo of the Millers relaxing on a boat.

In light of the charges in the crash, Halton Police Deputy Chief Andrew Fletcher spoke about the dangers of drunk driving at a press conference held at the scene Friday morning.

He said there has been much in the media recently about guns and gangs, but that "an impaired person behind the wheel is equally as dangerous as that gun in the hands of a gang member."

Charged with two counts of impaired driving causing death, two counts of dangerous driving causing death and refusing to provide a breath sample is Ingram Rahim Bakhsh, 28, of Ferguson Dr. Milton.

Bakhsh appeared at Ontario Court of Justice in Milton Monday for a bail hearing, which was remanded to Monday, July 30.

A funeral service for the Millers, the grandparents of 10 who had called Rockwood home for more than a decade, is to be held today (Wednesday) at 11 a.m. at the Rockmosa Community Centre.

—With files from Torstar News Service and Stephanie Hounsell

Tribunal ruling will determine fate of Halton Place events

CYNTHIA GAMBLE
Staff Writer

The fates of the national dog agility championships and qualifiers for international equestrian competitions next month are in limbo while local residents appeal a Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) decision permitting the events at an Environmental Review Tribunal (ERT) hearing this month.

Five residents refused to withdraw their appeals of a Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) decision on issuing permits for three events at Halton Place in rural Halton Hills— the Summer's Here horse show already held earlier this month, the AAC National Championships August 16-19 and the Canadian Country Classic, August 22-26 and August 29-Sept. 2.

The AAC National Championships, scheduled for August 16-19, are the Canadian national championships for dog agility enthusiasts. The Canadian Country Classic features a \$75,000 FEI World Cup Qualifier and an Eastern Canadian Qualifier for the FEI Children's International Jumping Final.

According to NEC staff report, the dog show would attract about 2,000 people and 200-250 cars. The horse show would attract about 5,000 people, 300-400 cars, and 150-200 trailers. A Halton Place press release, issued in April, noted the Country Classic

tournament would feature a classic car show, beach volleyball and BMX competition.

Those appealing the NEC decision are: Hilda Darcie, Paul Dodson, Ron Morin, Jack Pemberton and Mike Shantz.

A one-day hearing was held on Friday (July 20), and it will reconvene on Monday, July 30, 10 a.m. at the Civic Centre.

Believing that the residents had more concerns with Halton Place's future plans than with the actual events, ERT hearing officer Knox Henry suggested the five, with Halton Place counsel David Tang and NEC planner David Johnston, discuss possible compromises during an extended lunch break. But the residents pressed on with their appeal, fearing their withdrawal could prejudice possible appeals over Halton Place's comprehensive plan for the next three years, also now under consideration by the NEC. About a dozen residents were in the public gallery watching the proceedings.

Residents' concerns ranged from day-long and evening amplified noise, increased traffic resulting in air pollution, noise, dangerous road conditions, and inconvenience, loss of rural nature of their properties, and the subsequent devaluing of their properties, non-conformance to the NEC Plan and Halton Region and Town of Halton Hills Official Plans and the failure of Halton Place to heed conditions of their permits.

"I'm here to appeal because this agricultural area is being turned into an entertain-

ment area," said Darcie.

Despite being blocked visually by a mature woodlot, Darcie can still hear the events occurring at Halton Place. She also complained about the large number of vehicles going through an area designated as agricultural.

"Is noise and heavy traffic what we want in rural Halton?" she asked. "I think not."

Dodson agreed. "I would have moved to Maple if I wanted to live beside Wonderland instead of Timurland," in reference to Halton Place owner Timur Leckebusch.

"The Classic is a 10-day event," said Pemberton, the owner of two farms on Fourth Line. "Imagine having to listen to this (noise) all day long for 10 days."

Halton Place counselor David Tang suggested the residents could call Town of Halton Hills bylaw enforcement to file a complaint during the event.

Shantz explained he is trying to develop a tree farm, directly across the road from Halton Place, and he said the Canada Classic traffic might prevent potential customers during his peak sales time. But Tang pointed out that more traffic could mean for exposure for Shantz's new business.

Morin focused on the Summer's Here Junior Horse Show, which went ahead July 4-8, despite the appeal period having not yet lapsed. Appeals were filed on July 4. Tang said Halton Place had not received notice of any appeals that had filed prior to running

the event.

Morin also stated that at least two conditions of the NEC permit were not fulfilled such as paid duty police officers and use of the front driveway. He wondered if this would create a precedent for the two remaining shows. When Morin questioned Johnston whether the NEC has taken legal action, the NEC planner said not to his knowledge.

Morin also objected to a newly created driveway on a S-bend hill on 15 Sideroad, calling it "an accident waiting to happen."

While Henry patiently tried to keep the residents' comments strictly related to the topic of the dog show and the two horse shows rather than future activities, Pemberton pointed out it is the same thing.

"If allowed to continue, it will devalue the property of all the surrounding properties," he said.

In his opening statement Tang said plans are in the works for significant redevelopment of 200-acre Halton Place including doubling the number and size of the buildings, and it's those plans that really concern the residents— not the events under appeal. He said the events are permitted uses under the NEC Plan and the Official Plans, and these plans place agriculture ahead of simple residential uses in overall planning.

At next Monday's hearing, Dodson will present his case with witnesses, as will Halton Place.

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