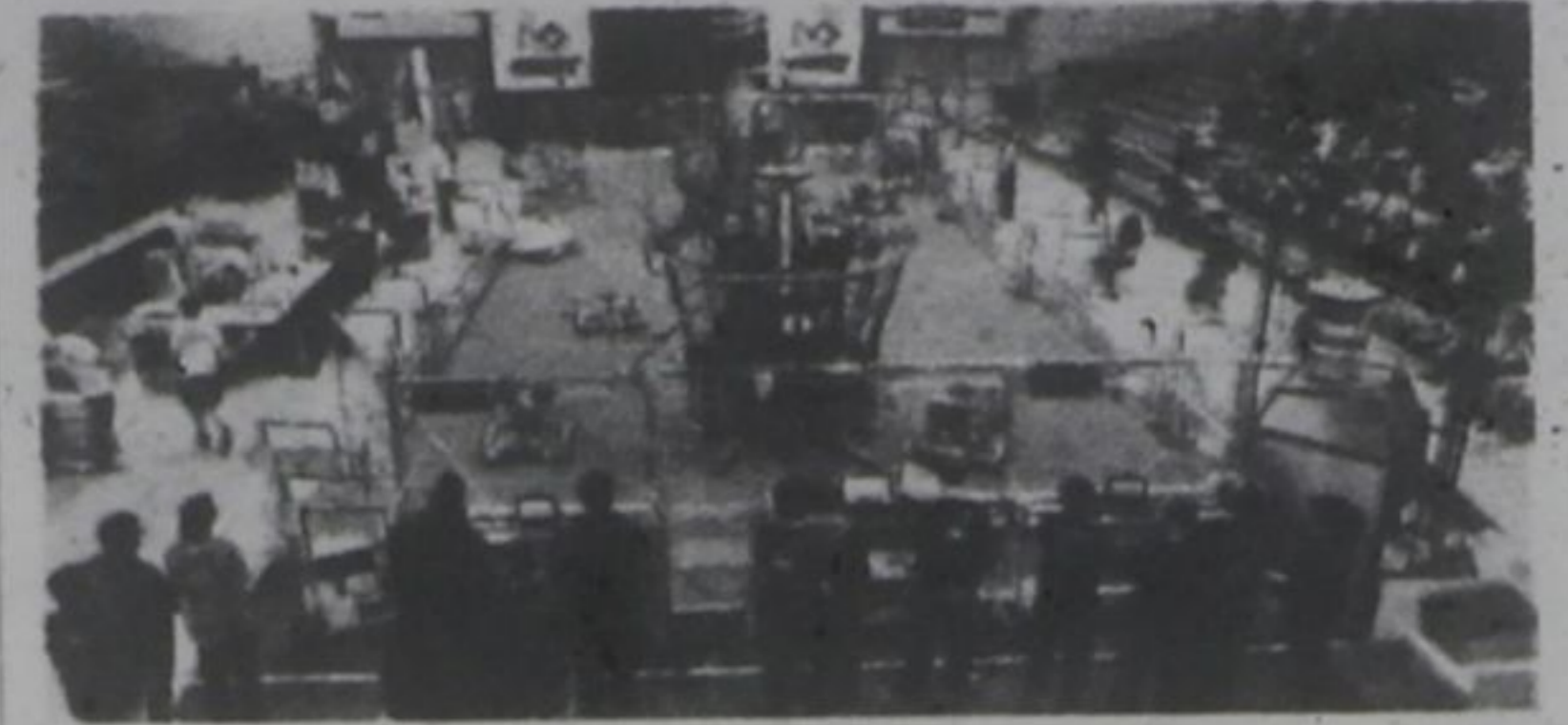


Schools await instructions about annual robotics competition



More than 1,000 students, volunteers, parents and sponsors attended the 2017 FIRST Robotics-Canada district competition at McMaster University. Competitors included students from Halton high schools. *Scott Gardner / Metroland*

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Ten teams of public high school students and teachers are preparing to build robots for an annual competition.

The Halton District School Board will be hosting its 2018 For Inspiration and Recognition in Science and Technology (FIRST) robotics kickoff on Saturday (Jan. 6) at New Street Education Centre in Burlington.

Approximately 500 students, teachers, community mentors and parents are expected to attend the kickoff.

Students and mentors received this year's

robotic challenge via a virtual feed — along with hundreds of thousands of students from around the world.

They have six weeks to build their team's robot before taking it to competitions across North America. Work on the bots will begin immediately after the kickoff event.

Among the 10 Halton public high schools participating in the 2018 FIRST robotics competition are Milton District and Craig Kielburger.

"Students on each of the 10 Halton teams,

along with guidance from their mentors and teachers, aim to build an impressive robot in six short weeks," said Veronica Kleinsmith, instructional program leader-technological education, for the Halton District School Board.

"These student-designed, built and programmed robots compete in challenging competitions that truly engage students in subjects such as science, technological education and mathematics to help prepare them for the careers of tomorrow."

Cullen reflects on career, looks forward to more time with family

10... have one year to design and obtain approvals followed by one year of construction. That school was done from start to finish in 10 months — design, approval and construction — (it) should have been impossible.

"The other (challenging project) would be Hayden (high school) a joint project with the City of Burlington. Seven years in the making but a good outcome at the end."

The day-to-day challenges are just as important and are perhaps harder to overcome, he said.

"The new schools everyone likes is an accomplishment so you can't understate that, but keeping 100 schools open every day and

keeping kids and schools safe and warm is probably a harder thing to do," he said.

He interacted with parents on a regular basis answering a multitude of questions over the years, often about concerns with local school issues like parking and driver/student safety. Cullen admits he wasn't planning to have a long career with a school board.

"I hadn't really planned to stay (long). I worked in the private sector for five years before I came here and I was looking to go back to the private sector," he said.

Cullen was born and raised in east Hamilton. He attended McMaster University and Mohawk College. He started with the Halton

public board in 1987, was appointed assistant superintendent in 1991 and then superintendent of facility services in 1994.

Cullen was involved in provincial issues through Ontario Association of School Business Officials serving as its committee chair, a board director and president.

He participated on several provincial panels and gave presentations related to education and facilities.

He said the board is in the process of finding his replacement and noted the board is in good hands currently as three managers who worked under him all have many years of experience in facilities management.

From a personal standpoint, Cullen says he married "my high school sweetheart", Linda, 34 years ago. They have two daughters, both married. Meaghan Hammond, 30, is an elementary teacher at Bruce Trail P.S. in Milton. Kat Cullen, 28, is in promotions and on air at Hamilton radio station KX 94.7 FM New Country.

Cullen said there isn't a thing he would change about his career.

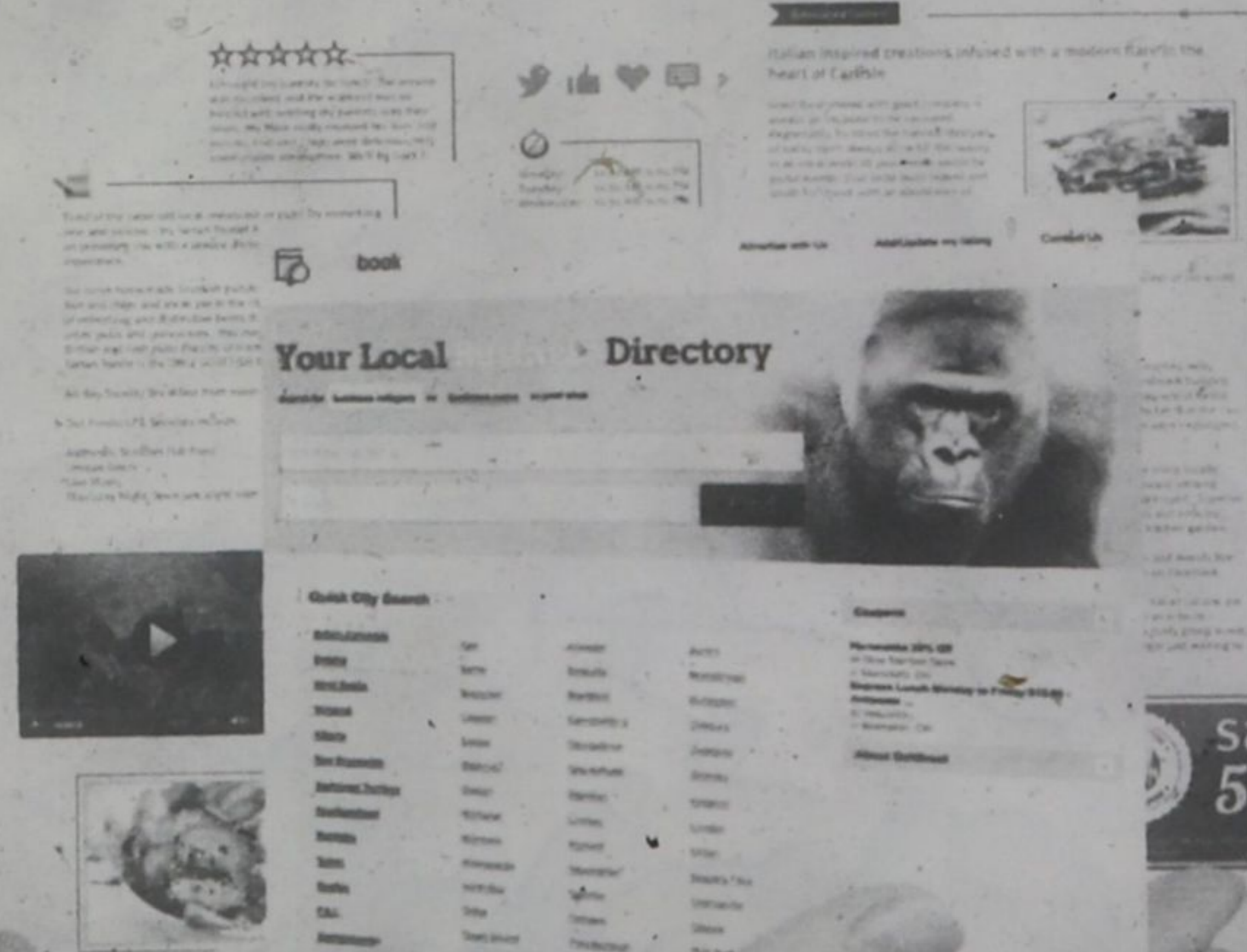
"It's been a good ride. There isn't one day of it I would undo. It's been a very busy and active 30 years."

His plans now are to relax a little.

"My wife is retiring at the same time so we hope to spend more time at the cottage and home."

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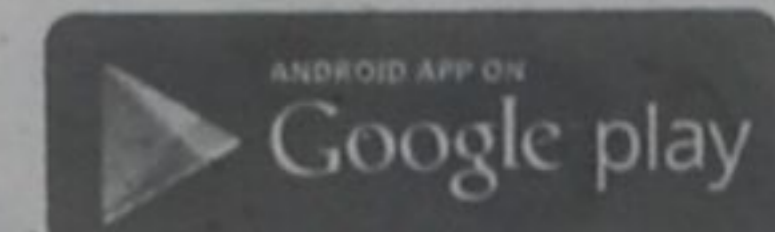
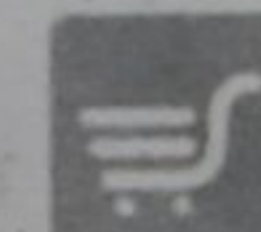
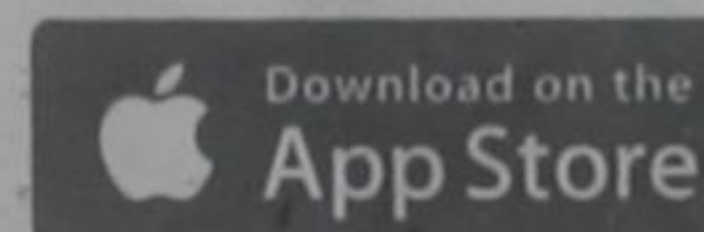
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