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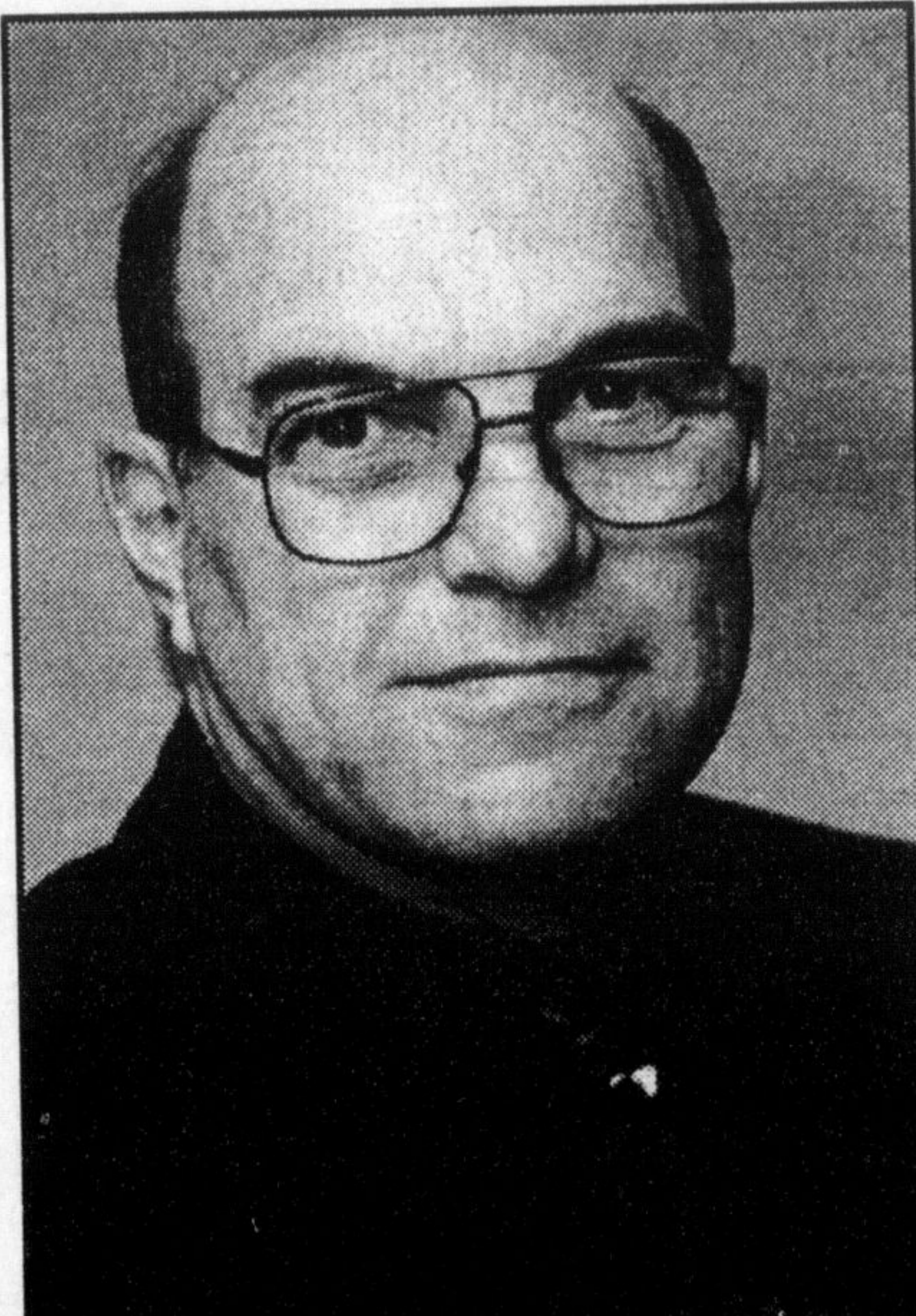
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Outspoken Deoni says he has more work to do



Joe Deoni

By STEVE LeBLANC

Special to The Champion

Amid the uncertainty cast over Ontario's education system, Joe Deoni remains a constant.

The outspoken 58-year-old Miltonian isn't sure just what new responsibilities he may assume — only that his work as a Roman Catholic School Board trustee is not yet complete.

"I've been wrestling with this for two weeks and finally put my papers in Wednesday (Oct. 8)," said Mr. Deoni, who had been encouraged to run for municipal council.

"I came to the decision while driving home from a (school) board meeting the previous evening. I drove by Holy Rosary (school) and realized I haven't finished the job yet."

Maintaining his board seat could prove to be a cakewalk for Mr. Deoni. His was the only name on the candidates list for either separate or public school trustees two days before Friday's 5 p.m. deadline.

Once a Ward 1 and 3 trustee, he will now represent all of Milton if acclaimed.

"This isn't surprising, due to reductions in the number of trustees in Halton (from 14 to 8) and the salary decrease (\$12,000 to \$5,000)," he explained.

"The provincial government hasn't really said what new responsibilities will be placed on trustees, but I rather suspect they'll assume more of a business oriented role and spend far less time in the schools."

In the wake of the teachers' battle with the Harris government over Bill 160, Mr. Deoni said he'll take whatever steps necessary — however unpleasant — to protect students' education.

While he doesn't expect an illegal walkout to last more than a few weeks, he is prepared to "suspend, demote or even terminate" those teachers who adhere to a lengthy strike.

He said union leaders are opposing smaller class sizes not to protect students but their own financial interests.

"The class size issue is a poker chip that teachers have been playing for years. A year-and-a-half ago the high school teachers settled for a 1.5 per cent pay increase with the understanding that the difference would be offset by increasing class size, which essentially means more money for the boards.

"The teachers got their increase but now their fighting against the government dictating class sizes. That's somewhat hypocritical," he said.

Quoting a Statistics Canada report that described average Ontario high school students as borderline illiterates compared to other provinces, Mr. Deoni blasted teachers for singing the praises of their education system.

"Prior governments have spent top dollars on education and our kids are illiterate. (Mike) Harris and (John) Snobelen are taking a different avenue and moving in the right direction."

On the eve of his fourth term as local trustee, Mr. Deoni isn't about to sing his own praises. In fact, if you ask him what his past successes on the job have been, he'll answer with an adamant "nothing."

"It would be facetious to say I did this or I did that. Sure I've pushed for renovations at Holy Rosary and other schools, but so have others and it's the entire board that approves or rejects plans."

Fun for the kids during child week

The Week of the Child will be celebrated locally through a variety of family activities starting Monday, Oct. 20.

The special week October 18 to 25 will be featured with 'Story-Telling Made Easy' at CHERISH Family Resource Centre from 7 to 9 p.m. Call 875-INFO to register.

The Milton Children and Youth Centre will focus on the theme, 'I am Special'. Call 876-1244 for information.

The week will wrap up Saturday, Oct. 25 at Milton Mall with performances by the Milton Children's Chorus at 11 and 11:30 a.m.

The mall event will also feature crafts, children's art and community group displays, colouring contests and prizes.

October 18 to 25 was proclaimed the Week of the Child by the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario's (AECEO) Halton branch and the Town of Milton.

The celebration originated following the International Year of the Child, proclaimed by the United Nations in 1979.

The AECEO designed the week as a time for communities to focus on the needs, rights and interests of children, and to heighten public awareness of the value of quality early childhood education.

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