

Foxfire was not a big issue, says retiring trustee

By BRAD REAUME
The Champion

School board divisions and school closures dominated Tim Kingsbury's term as Halton Board of Education trustee.

He is quitting school politics, to be replaced by Erica Andrew, who will be Milton's only representative on the scaled-back Halton board.

The controversy surrounding teaching the novel Foxfire at Milton District High School would not rank among the 50 most important things that occurred during his tenure with the school board, he said.

"The time spent by the board on Foxfire was minimal," he explained. "However, with Foxfire, the system did work. Now, if a parent disagrees with an approved book for whatever reason there will be alternatives provided."

The rural Milton trustee said there is a certain joy in taking a position to the board with which he totally disagrees, to insure the minority opinion is heard.

He explained that wildly differing views provide a point of reference for any discussion.

"The Frank Gue's of the world give you an opposing view which you can then deal with," he said, in reference to the outspoken president of the Taxpayer's Coalition, Burlington.

Mr. Gue is a longtime board watchdog. A member of his organization filed suit against several trustees for conflict of interest. The suit was later dropped.

Perhaps the most hours he expended were on the school closure issue. Several schools were slated to be closed for a variety of reasons, including low enrolments and poor building conditions.

Percy Merry School in rural Milton was one, but determined work of a parents' committee convinced board members to change their minds.

Mr. Kingsbury remains proud of his efforts to help create a process to evaluate the viability of schools. He says it is in use throughout the province.

"Percy Merry was a classic marginal case," said Mr. Kingsbury. "At the end of the day the people there form a better community for what they went through."

Mr. Kingsbury pointed to finance meetings with constituents as turning points in board policies.

He said a particular meeting in Brookville may have generated ideas that saved the board \$500,000. One idea alone on computer maintenance cut board costs by \$65,000.

"The ideas don't cost you anything," he said. "I'll take 10,000 ideas that can all save even \$500."

He considered running for another term

as a trustee. However, he explained the changes to trustee duties contained in recent legislation drained away his interest.

He said changes would turn the trustee's job into that of a complaint taker. Given also that he would be responsible for some 80 schools, he did not feel he could continue with the same level of commitment that he had provided in the past.

"It's been a wonderful experience," he said. "I learned a number of skills."

He will continue in his role until December 31, when newly elected school board trustees are slated to begin their new term.

The biggest problem with the Halton public board was its divided nature. Mr. Kingsbury said their was a definite 10-8

split on most important issues.

He noted each faction wanted to achieve the same ends, however the smaller one was perhaps more radical in its approach.

"The biggest failing of any organization is when its members fail to become part of a team. We were one of the most divisive boards in Ontario."

However, he admitted having diverse opinions often creates the best policy.

Mr. Kingsbury was chair of the finance committee. He said if government mandated programs instituted since 1985 were removed from the education mix, taxes would have been reduced 14 per cent from that time, rather than increased more than 100 per cent.

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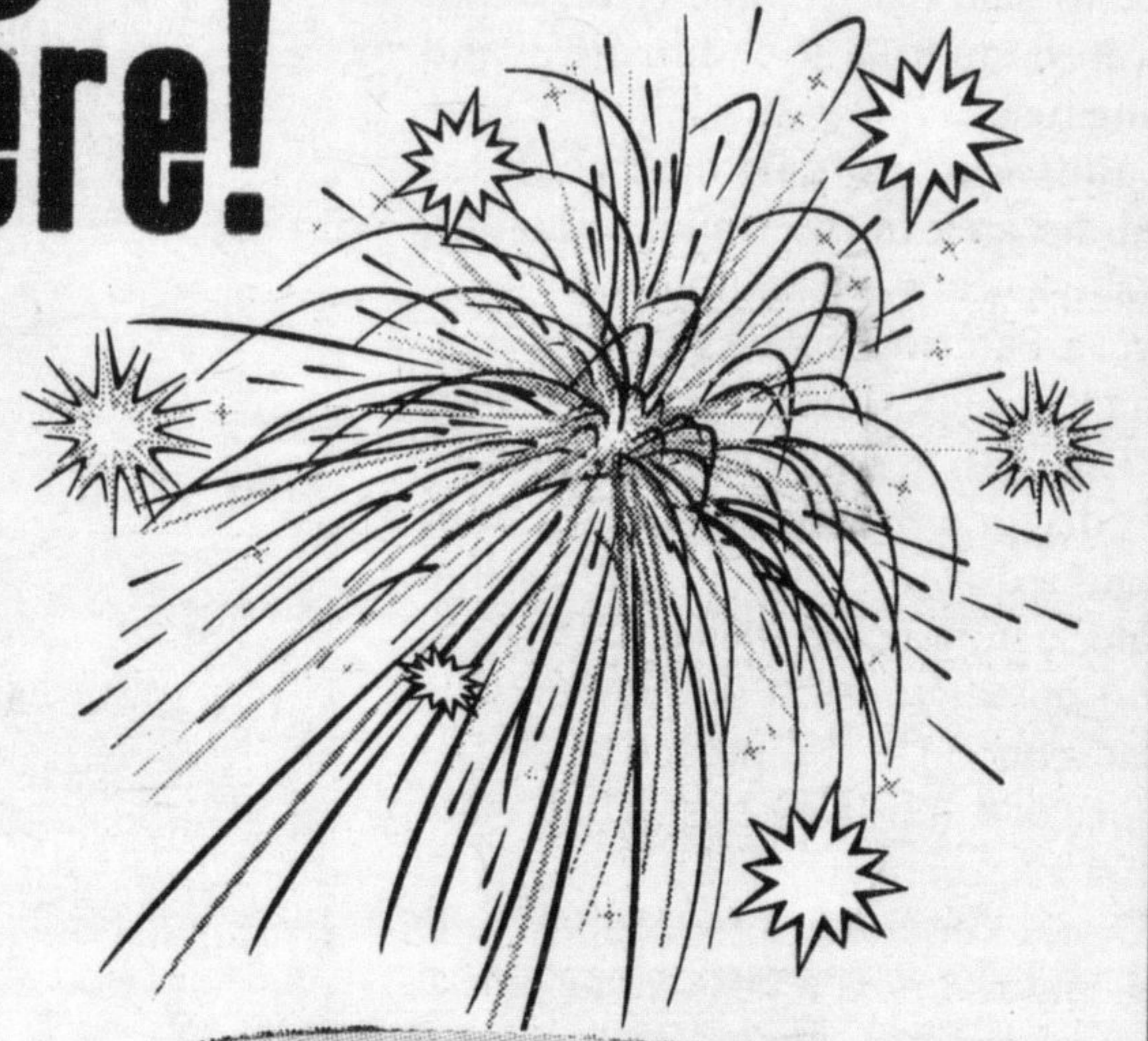
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