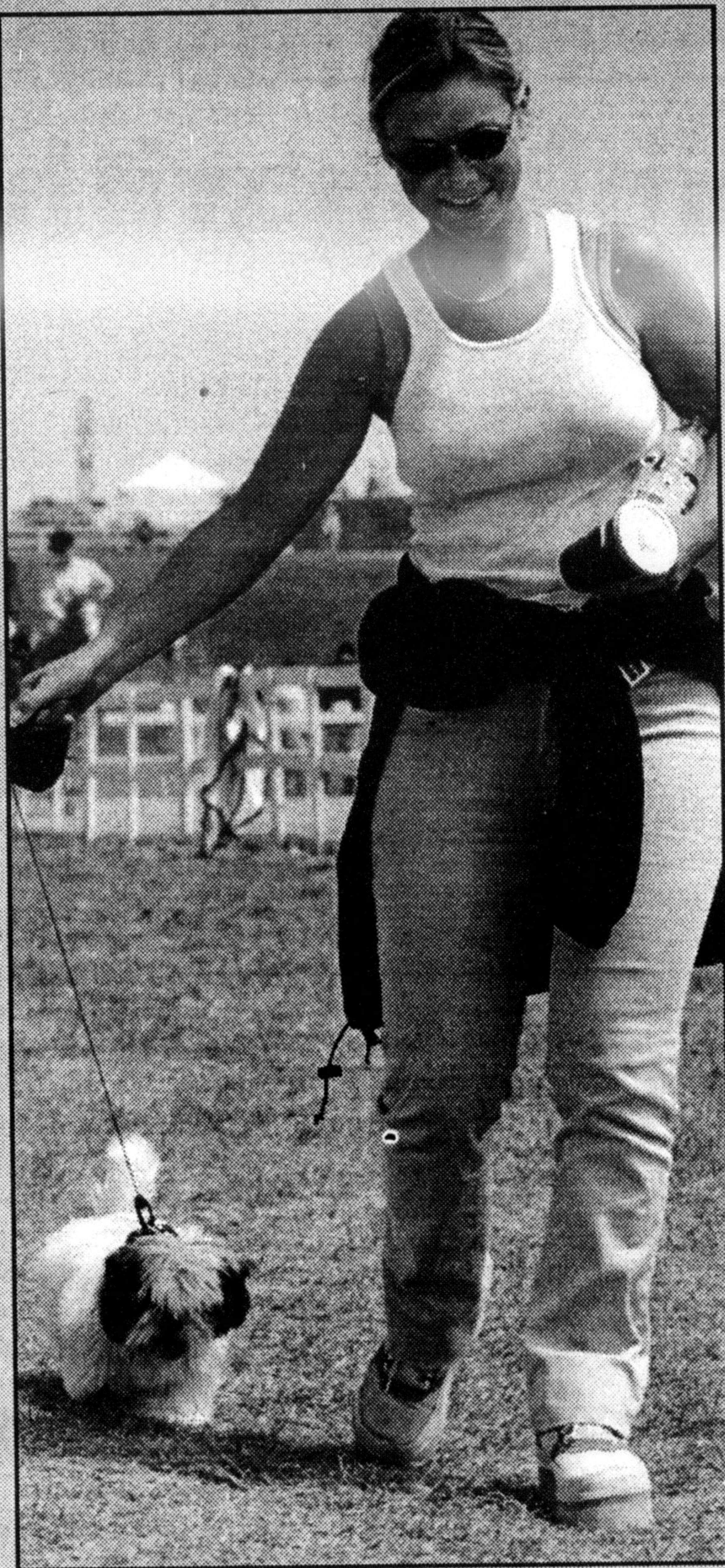




Dog days of summer

Little shihtzu puppy Dickens found the heat a little too much to handle over the weekend and ended up having to be carried home by loving owner Holly Taylor.



Police union may push for staffing needs study

By HOWARD MOZEL
Special to The Champion

While regional council plans to embark on an independent review of local law enforcement, the Halton Regional Police Association (HRPA) may ask for a binding provincial analysis of its own.

According to HRP president Constable Bill Henshaw, his staff is currently gathering information to lay the groundwork for a possible review by the Ontario Civilian Commission on Police Services (OCCOPS).

"We don't necessarily think that an independent body to review the budget is a bad thing, but the only legislative body is OCCOPS," said Const. Henshaw.

Halton regional council recently decided in favour of an outside, independent review of long-term policing needs and their impact on the budget. Every year a battle brews at regional headquarters over the policing budget, which this year was \$43.5 million (an 8.3 per cent increase from last year.)

Const. Henshaw said no one knows yet just who would conduct the region's review.

HRPA administrator Paul LaCourse said OCCOPS is the only body with the statutory authority to determine whether any police service is providing "adequate and effective" policing.

"The association is of the opinion the police service is severely understaffed and we are giving serious consideration to filing a formal request with (OCCOPS) to review the adequacy and effectiveness of the Halton Regional Police Service," said Mr. LaCourse.

"We are confident a review completed by OCCOPS, or another organization, if done properly, will clearly show the Halton police service is understaffed."

Const. Henshaw said that for the rank and file police association members this debate is not one they take lightly. The stakes are high, he said, for both the public and the officers entrusted to protect them.

"It's not a political issue with us, it's safety," he

said.

Const. Henshaw explained that basically all the HRP has to do is tell OCCOPS that policing is not adequate to serve the people of Halton. For now, though, they're holding off.

"We want to satisfy that we have the justification first," explained Const. Henshaw, who said his gut feeling is any outside review will reveal that the force is understaffed. "I want to have the case prepared before we ask."

These preparations include calculating what Const. Henshaw calls the "authorized strength" versus the "actual strength" of the service. Added to the mix will be everything from workload and clearance rates to response times. While not involving itself in budgets, OCCOPS also takes into account a municipality's ability to pay.

The HRP called for an OCCOPS review in 1989, an investigation which ultimately required Halton to hire 49 new officers and one civilian. Const. Henshaw said that with attrition and other factors only 34 officers were actually hired.

In a presentation earlier this year, police Chief Peter Campbell outlined that — if OCCOPS' 1989 recommendations and criteria were extrapolated through 1998 — Halton would have to hire 36 more officers this year. Ten more officers would need to be brought on board in 1999, 13 more in 2000 and 14 more in 2001.

"Right now we're trying to establish how much below authorized strength the force is," said Const. Henshaw. "If I accept the Chief's numbers, is there any doubt?"

This year, for example, nine new constables were to have been hired. Because of the protracted budget process, recruits missed the deadline for the Ontario Police College.

Personnel is already stretched to the limit, said Const. Henshaw, despite new hiring. After all, he explained, for every six officers hired only one is on the road 24 hours a day.

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