

Council will not back one school at expense of other

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

Town council won't be taking sides in a tug of war between rural and urban schools on the issue of school closures.

"I don't think we should get into the battle of urban versus rural," said Councillor Rick Malboeuf. "I don't want to get into 'this school is more important or has more activities.'"

Mr. Malboeuf was responding to a request for special consideration of rural schools such as Hornby's Percy Merry Public School.

"We're asking for your support in keeping our school open," said Kim Pickering, chair of the Percy Merry school council.

She asked council to back a motion in support of the provincial government providing enough funding to keep rural schools open. Council balked.

Percy Merry is one of two schools potentially on the chopping block in Milton. Also threatened is Martin Street public school.

They are under the gun thanks to a Ministry of Education directive aimed at determining which boards are under-populated and which are in need of new schools.

The directive states that any board doing nothing about excess space now will not be eligible for new school funding later.

That has put the 109-student Percy Merry on the edge for the second time.

The tiny rural school with a 225 student capacity managed to save itself two years ago by arguing that Milton's population boom will soon fill any vacant seats.

If it doesn't, the school is willing to experiment with growth options such as broadening school boundaries or increasing enrolment to include grades seven and eight.



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— GORD KRANTZ

Presently, the school has classes from kindergarten to grade six.

"We feel that by the year 2000 we'd be close to being full," said Ms Pickering.

Schools in rural areas do double duty by also acting as community centres, she said.

Mayor Gord Krantz was reluctant to take sides with any one school that may be facing the axe.

"We're faced with the possibility of three or four school closings. I'm just a little hesitant about singling out one for better or worse treatment," he said.

Council shouldn't interfere in areas out of their jurisdiction, said Councillor John Challinor.

"I get very nervous about municipal councils getting into a jurisdiction that isn't their business," he said. "This is the school board's responsibility. Let's not get areas of jurisdiction confused as we go forward."

Even so, Percy Merry's role in its community should be noted, argued Councillor Cindy Lunau.

"I agree that it's not our business to tell the board what schools they should or should not close but we should recognize that the school is the hub of the community," she said. "Basically we're leaving a whole community poised for growth in the lurch."

Councillor Rick Day, who represents the area Percy

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Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Got her surrounded

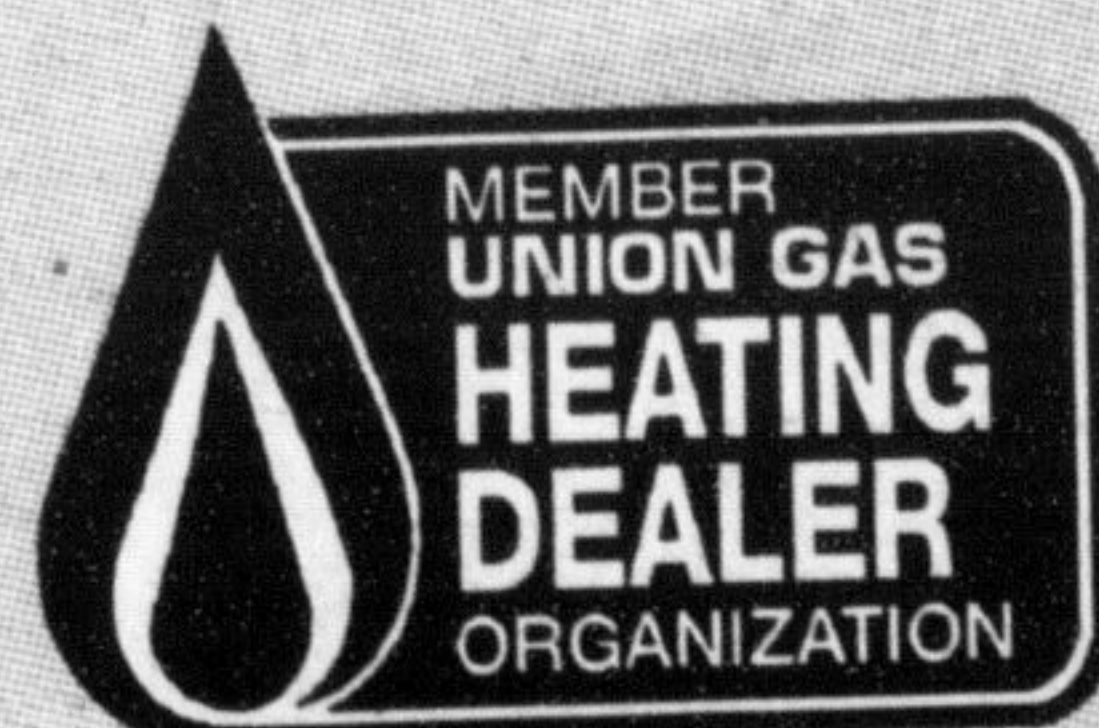
Christine Adams, 13, with the Canadian Girls In Training is surrounded by stuff toys the group had for sale as a recent fundraiser, part of their Village Fair at St. Paul's Church.

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