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Champion COMMUNITY Page

Making past come alive is Jim Dills' passion

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

The Champion

Jim Dills may be taken with the past, but his immediate future looks pretty bright as well. The 68-year-old Miltonian — who for decades now has passionately helped preserve local heritage — is set to be honoured with the Chamber of Commerce's Lifetime Achievement Award.

He'll accept it at the 1999 Community Awards Gala this Saturday at Granite Ridge Golf Club.

"I'm very honoured, but as always it makes me think of how many others who are equally deserving," said the historian, referring to the team effort for nearly all initiatives with which he becomes involved. "This is certainly out of the blue. I've already been well honoured by this town in the past."

The past — that's something most of us think about when referring to Mr. Dills, co-founder and active member of the Milton Historical Society.

And what many longtime residents will perhaps best remember is his hand in rescuing the county courthouse, now the Town Hall building, which was destined for demolition in the late '70s before a small band of activists successfully lobbied to save it.

Recalled Mr. Dills, "The county buildings were abandoned and derelict. A few of us, including librarian Shelagh Conway and school inspector Leonard McNeil, decided that action must be taken or else it would become a pile of rubble."

Seeing the value in restoration rather than ruin, the trio solicited support from the public as well as politicians and eventually reached their goal. "It was a pretty courageous move by the Town to repair the building, \$3 million was an awful lot of money back then," he said.

Since then Mr. Dills has uncovered many fascinating tidbits about the historic structure and its surrounding grounds — including the fact that at least two public hangings were carried out there. And that's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to his tireless research efforts. He explained, "The excitement is in the discovery. I've found so many interesting things about this town and for the most part I'm still stuck in the 1800s."

Through the Milton Historical Society, Mr. Dills has helped put together a number of publications about local history. Realizing that another avenue might be needed to start reaching a younger audience, he recently co-produced a video with Halton Cable on the history of Victoria Park, which he hopes will be available to schools in the near future.

"This community has a rich historic reservoir, but you still have to tell people about it and get them excited."

Mr. Dills has done just that over the years through regular walking tours and presentations — most recently about the local newspaper business, in which he was an active player for more than two decades. He's also helped place Milton Historical Society plaques on more than 100 area homes and is in the midst of rejuvenating interest in the town's agricultural heritage.

"Probably the most rewarding thing for me is all the great people I've come to know like Alex Cooke, Jack Charlton, Ken Lamb, Mike Ledwith and many others," said Mr. Dills. "I've had so many wonderful experiences working with different people on local projects."

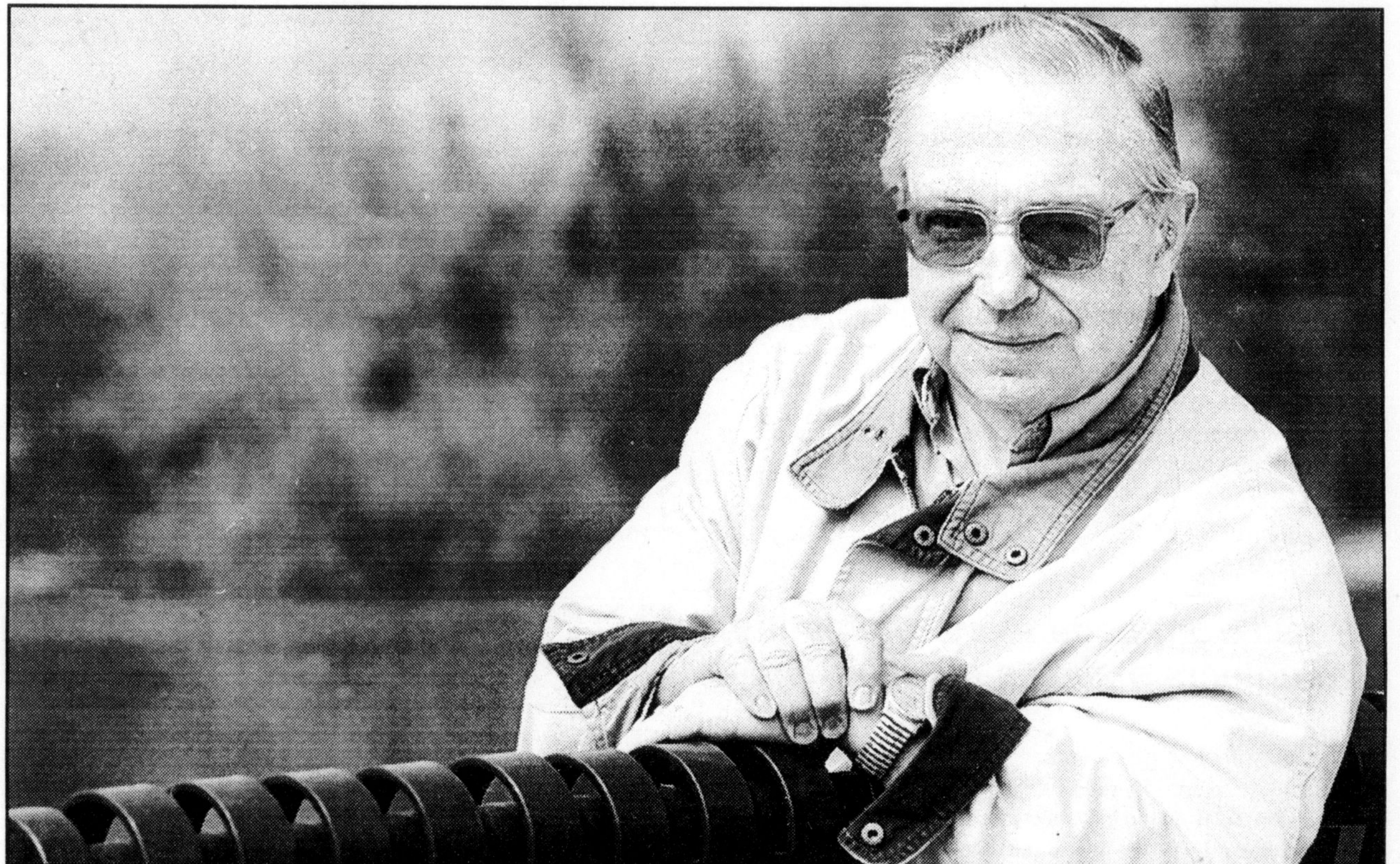


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Local historian Jim Dills is set to be honoured with the Chamber of Commerce's Lifetime Achievement Award, which will be presented to him this coming weekend.

Internet program takes students on a long, computerized journey

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

The Champion

Milton youngsters are about to embark on a cross-country journey — only suitcases, extra socks and postcards for the folks won't be necessary for this trip.

All that's required is the click of a button and a willingness to experience all that Canada has to offer.

This Internet excursion — that will be enjoyed by students at 80 schools nation-wide including Brookville, E.W. Foster and Our Lady of Victory — has been made possible through an education initiative by Governor General Romeo LeBlanc.

On April 15, he'll send off three cycling teams from Rideau Hall in Ottawa. For the next nine weeks, these voyageurs will visit each participating school and share their discoveries.

In turn, those students are to act as program hosts for that day

by posting information about their school curriculum, community and individual interests, which will be accessed by fellow youths from British Columbia to Nova Scotia and all points in between.

"It's a great idea, to have a student exchange like this," said Mary Kebalo-Plata, who'll run the Canadian Heritage Interactive Journey at E.W. Foster. "They'll get to see the trends and cultures of places all across the country. Plus they'll become more Internet literate."

Brookville instructor Marg Davies knows all about the educational rewards associated with Internet ventures of this magnitude.

Last year her students connected with those from Central America, who taught them about archeological digs and the ancient Mayans.

"Any kind of real life experience like this is a wonderful opportunity for learning," she said.

While the program's grand kick-off isn't for another week or

• see PROGRAM on page 10

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