

Hunter calls for heart machines on fire trucks to help save lives

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

Lives could be saved by adding defibrillators to Milton fire trucks, says Councillor Wally Hunter.

"I think it is a critical issue if you can save one or two lives," he said.

Mr. Hunter pitched the idea to council just one day before the release of a Canadian study that showed heart attack victims have a far greater chance of survival if emergency vehicles arriving on the scene have defibrillators on board.

The study, carried out by the Loeb Health Research Institute and just published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, tracked 6,000 patients in 19 Ontario communities over four years.

It concluded that patients who suffered a heart attack outside of a hospital had a 30 per cent greater chance of survival when vehicles with defibrillators were dispatched to the scene.

That survival rate hinged upon the vehicle arriving in eight minutes or less.

That response time could flatline a Milton bid for defibrillators, said Fire Chief Harold Penson.

At present, the Ministry of Health requires that certain response times be met before defibrillators — or small electric shock paddles used on the hearts of patients suffering from cardiac arrest — can be added to trucks.

While the full-time day staff at the Milton fire department would likely meet the requirement, volunteer night staff

would have a tougher time of it, said Chief Penson.

"At night we're dealing with part-time staff who have to come into the station," he said. "We can't meet that requirement."

The average response time in Milton is 11 minutes. In an urban area, the ideal is closer to four.

Adding more full-time staff is the most likely way to meet the requirement, said Chief Penson.

"The only way around it now is to add full-time people around the clock," he said.

It's possible that Milton's ability to meet required response times in the daylight hours could be enough to swing the Ministry's favour, said Chief Penson.

The issue is even more critical now that Halton Region has decided to go with the status quo in ambulance service, said Mr. Hunter.

That means Milton and Halton Hills will continue to be largely served by the volunteer Halton Hills Ambulance Service (HHAS).

Part-time hours and volunteer workers make it unlikely for advanced life support paramedics, or P2s, to be added to HHAS staff.

P2s have higher training than basic life support paramedics.

That makes defibrillators on fire trucks all the more vital, said Mr. Hunter.

"I think it's critical in areas such as Nassagaweya," he said. "Fire trucks often know the area much better than ambulances. They could get to the scene first."

Currently, both Oakville and Burlington

• see MACHINES on page 7



Wally Hunter

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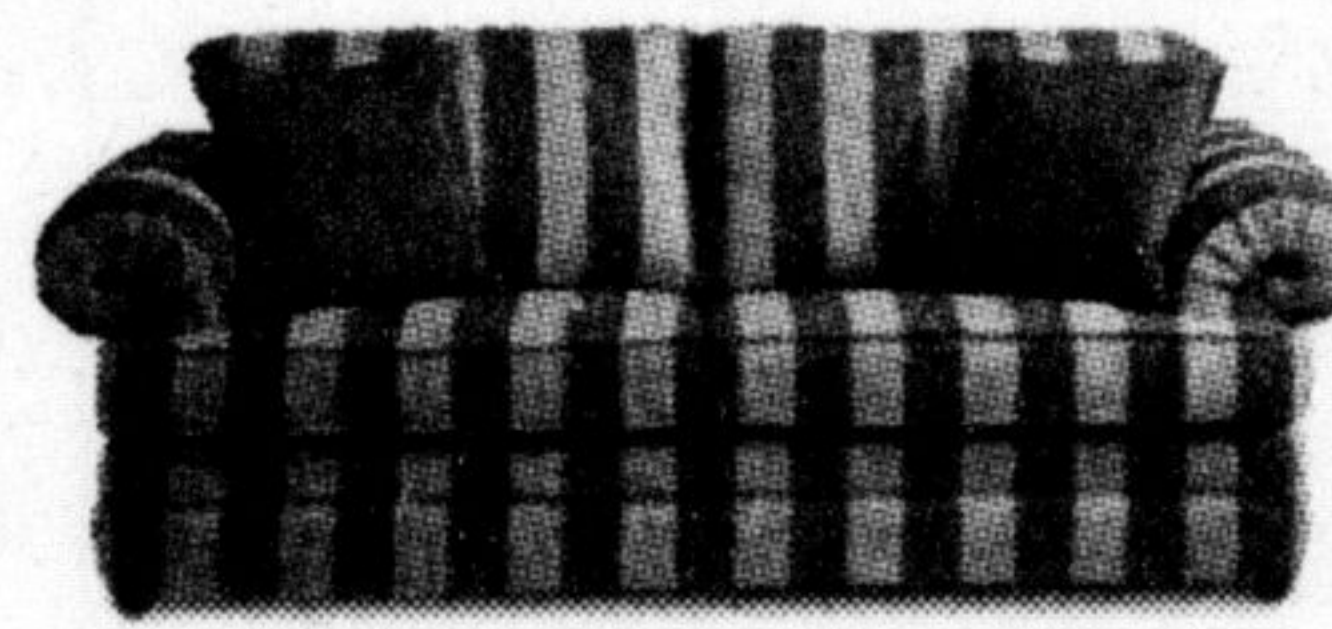
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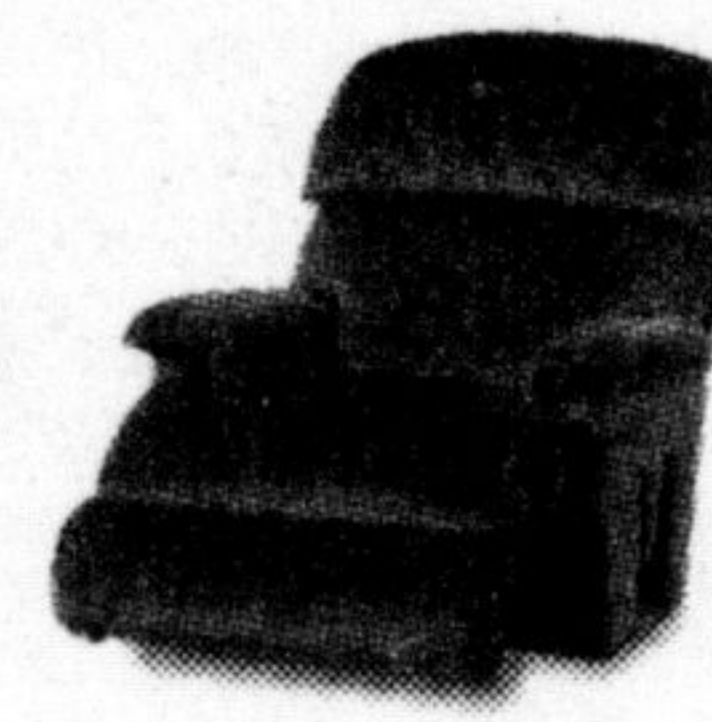
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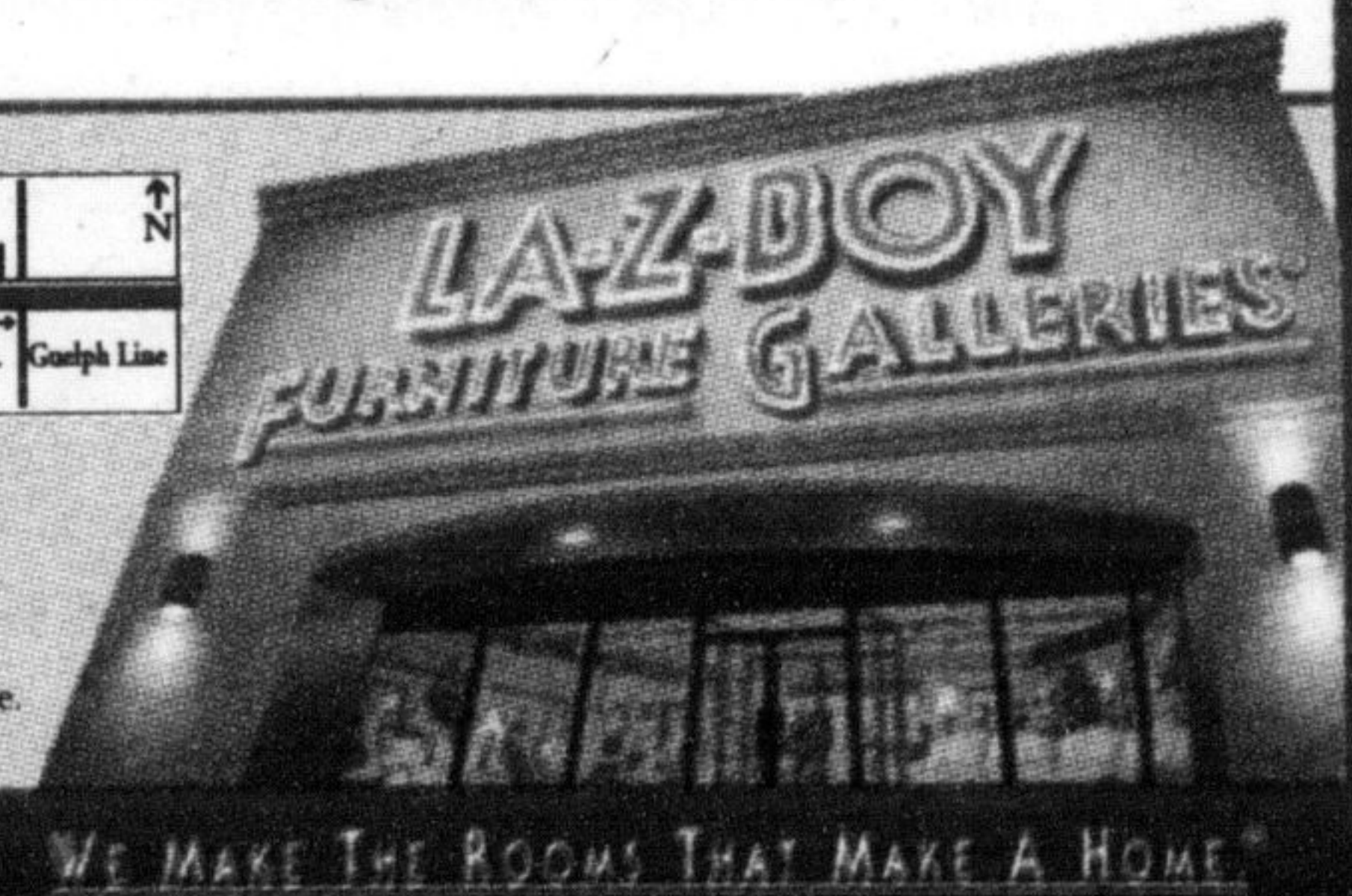
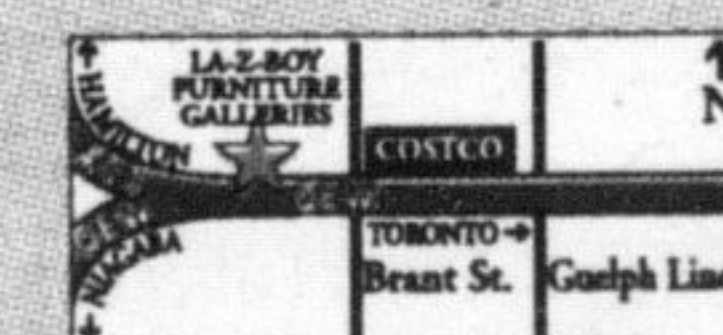
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