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COMMUNITY *Page*

Tapping museum potential has only just begun

By **IRENE GENTLE**
The Champion

A visit to Milton's Farm Museum can be like a slow waltz down memory lane for area seniors. For urban kids, it's like gaining entry into another world.

Either way, the historical museum is headed for a fabulous future, said general manager Reg Cressman.

That despite having its funding pulled by the Ontario government three years back.

It's all part of a three-year plan to make the former Ontario Agricultural Museum self-sufficient by 2001.

"We don't just have a passive museum where people just visit once," said Mr. Cressman. "We're trying to create an active tourism site."

A background in both business and agriculture has armed Mr. Cressman with a vision in which the past, present and future of farming are intertwined.

Deep roots in the past will allow the 32-hectare site boasting a collection of 30 old farm buildings and exhibits to bloom in the future, said Mr. Cressman.

"What we want to do is look back through a historical lens," he said.

Richly textured period pieces such as a log pioneer farmstead, an 1876 church, an 1886 school house and spewing, sputtering steam engines bring history to life at the museum.

The feeling of being transported into the past continues through the presence of a blacksmith, who can be found working in his smithy during summer weekend visiting hours.

But the museum won't stand the test of time without incorporating some very modern ideas, said Mr. Cressman.

Current crop and livestock displays illustrate the work involved on a present day farm.

But the contemporary touch is most prominent in the new, service-oriented attitude of the museum.

"Everything we do is aimed at delighting our customers," said Mr. Cressman. "If you aren't service oriented, you aren't going to survive."

A one-year contract running an amusement park in Waterloo helped Mr. Cressman sharpen his business acumen.

It also helped provide on the job training in target marketing.

Kids, seniors and young families will

likely be the museum's bread and butter as it struggles for self-sufficiency, said Mr. Cressman.

Eventually, that mandate will expand to include tourism.

The complex will become even more precious as Milton expands its urban borders, predicted Mr. Cressman.

"I think it's critical that this facility be maintained," he said. "There isn't a single person who has said this is a dumb thing to do."

The museum will preserve a taste of old Milton within the new growth, said Mr. Cressman.

"Nestled in the middle of all that (new development) will be a pleasant heritage centre where people will be able to touch their roots," he said.

Today, the biggest hurdle is getting the public to realize that the complex is open for business.

But with attendance gathering steam, Mr. Cressman plans to revitalize the museum through a combination of entrepreneurial energy and public spirit.

He would like to see the latter come from a minority share acquired by the Ontario government.

It is a viable vision for a place with such tremendous — though until now untapped — potential, contended Mr. Cressman.

"My guess is there has never been a driving force permitting it to become entrepreneurial," he said.

These days, the facility is making its name as a colourful site for gatherings such as weddings and corporate functions.

Education programs geared to school children are also a main thrust of the museum, which charges \$3.99 a head for the experience.

The programs are designed to be in accordance with the new Ontario school curriculum.

Not satisfied with the museum being an educational haven for things past and present, Mr. Cressman is ready to showcase the direction of agriculture's future.

"History never stops, it's only a point in time," he said. "The development of agriculture is an ongoing continuum."

The Farm Museum is located at 144 Tremaine Road and is open to the public weekdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. through July and August.

Admission is \$7 for adults, \$6 for seniors and \$4 for children 6-12.

For more information, call the museum at 878-8151.

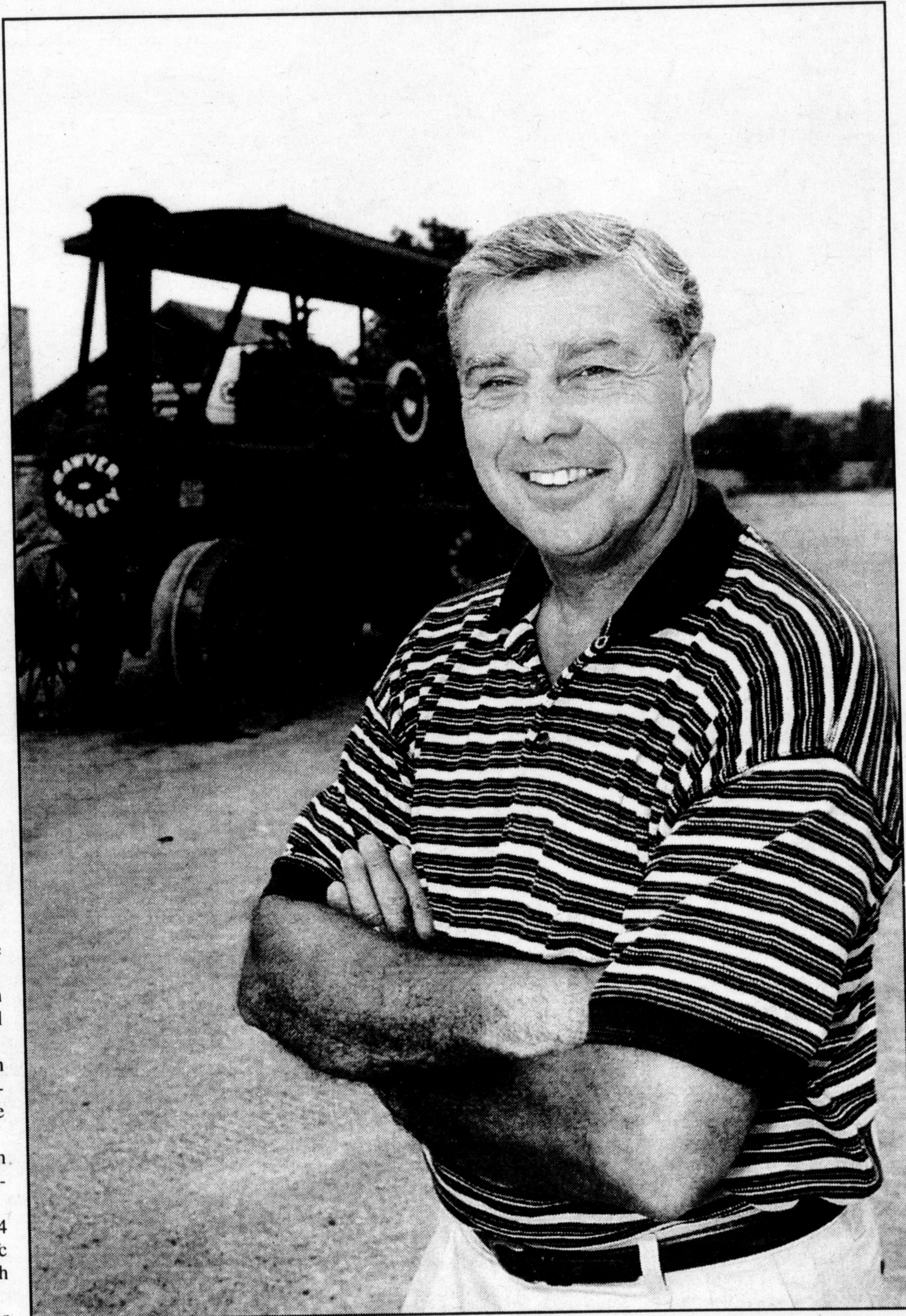


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

A vintage Sawyer Massey steam engine is just one of the treats at the Farm Museum, now headed by general manager Reg Cressman.

Cableworks 14 Programming Schedule — July 20th - July 26th, 1999

Tuesday, July 27th	Wednesday, July 28th	Thursday, July 29th	Monday, August 2nd
5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!	Simcoe Day No Programming
6:00pm The Garden Tour	6:00pm SportsZONE Game of the Week	6:00pm The Issue Is ...	
7:00pm The Issue Is ...	7:00pm The Garden Tour	7:00pm Internet 101	
	8:00pm Milton Council - July 19th		

Feature of the week: Tina Teggart keeps you Plugged in! with a new show each day!

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