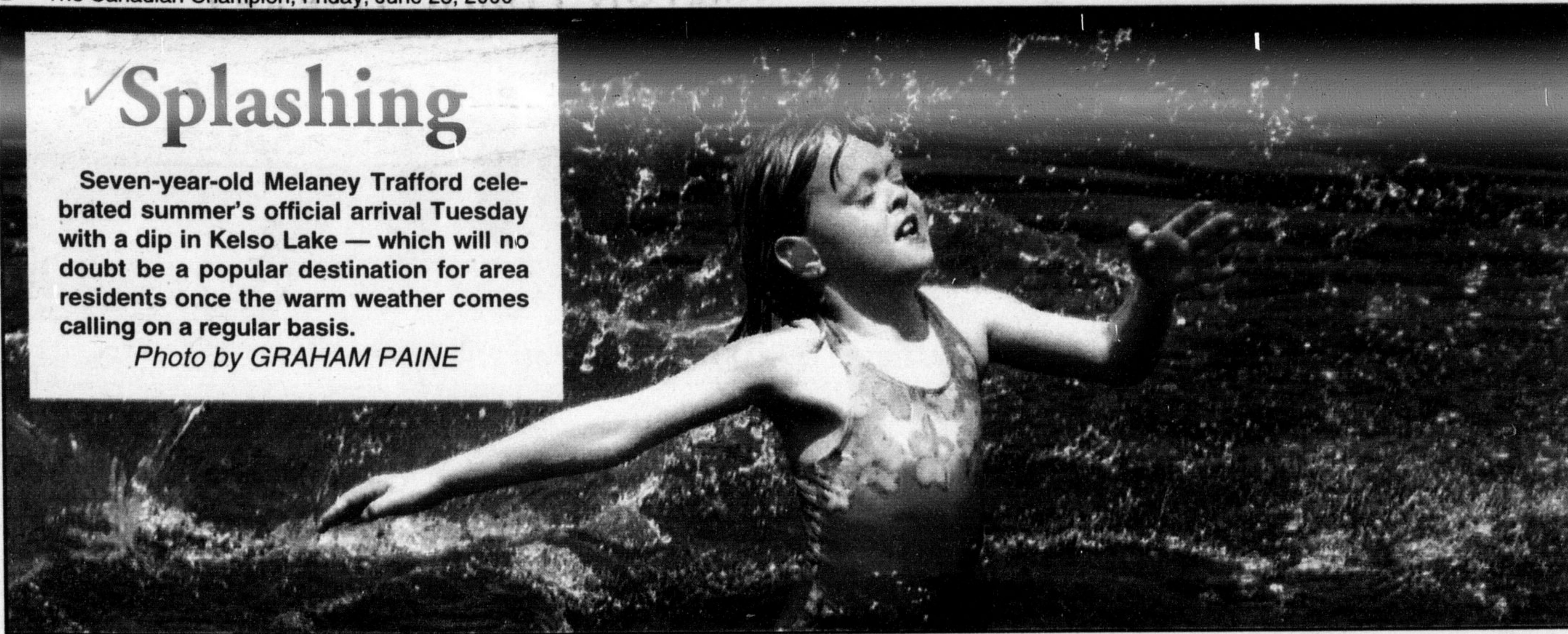


Splashing

Seven-year-old Melaney Trafford celebrated summer's official arrival Tuesday with a dip in Kelso Lake — which will no doubt be a popular destination for area residents once the warm weather comes calling on a regular basis.

Photo by GRAHAM PAINE



Province orders casino freeze

By IRENE GENTLE

The Champion

All bets are off for turning Mohawk Raceway into a full casino in the near future.

The odds turned after Cabinet decided last week to hold off rolling the dice on any new casinos in the province for a three-year period.

The one exception is an Eastern Ontario community, which could see a casino built if given the green light by its residents.

The freeze will allow the Province to study the social impacts of gaming, explained Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh.

"We want to see what happens when it settles down," he said. "Let's go slow on this."

Potential problems such as crime and policing, traffic and addiction risk will all be put under the microscope.

"After a year you can see what actually happens," said Mr. Chudleigh.

The news was greeted with a shrug by Mayor Gord Krantz.

"I don't have any problem with regard to a freeze," he said. "It really does give you a chance to catch your breath. There are a lot of questions looming out there."

The idea of slamming the lid on new casinos has been kicking around since February, said Mr. Chudleigh.

But news of the moratorium slowly trickled out this week to allow municipalities like Milton to decide whether to hold a referendum on the issue this November.

Under current guidelines, casinos are given the nod only after community approval is received via a referendum.

Referendums are tied to municipal elections and in this area could be initiated by either the Ontario Jockey Club or the municipality.

Mr. Chudleigh would like to see the public pulse taken this November despite the announced deferment.

"I'd still like to see the issue put on the ballot," he said. "My impression is it would be approved."

That would stand Milton in good stead to compete with other slot machine/racing venues such as Woodbine Racetrack in the future, he added.

"I'd have liked to see Mohawk have tables put in but if that's going to happen three years from now, that's all well and good," said Mr. Chudleigh.

But until the Province reopens the door to casinos, a November referendum would be a waste of time, said Councillor Wally Hunter.

"If the Province says you can't do it, there's no point in even talking about it," he said. "I don't particularly agree with gambling as a way to raise tax revenue anyway."

Mr. Krantz said he believed the issue should be put on the back burner until the moratorium is lifted.

Town staff estimate that Milton will pocket \$6.5 million from Mohawk slot machine revenues this year.

The Town has netted \$4.5 million in proceeds since 750 slot machines were added to Mohawk last August.

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