



# Champion COMMUNITY Page

## Trauma centre eases damaged souls

By HOWARD MOZEL  
Special to The Champion

The Halton Trauma Centre has survived for 17 years on a shoestring budget, but like those damaged souls to whom it ministers, survival alone simply isn't enough, said its executive director.

After all, said Paul Bennett, children possess the expectation that adults will protect them and so morally and ethically the entire community is obligated to do so.

Fortunately, centre staff go above and beyond to help survivors of all ages with next to no funding.

"There are a lot of challenges but there is a lot of commitment," said Mr. Bennett.

Known since 1983 as the Halton Centre for Childhood Sexual Abuse, the centre launched its new name and mandate in 1999 to expand services to include physical, emotional and psychological abuse plus child maltreatment and neglect. All are equally traumatic, said Mr. Bennett, causing devastating, long-term damage.

"We're looking at this through the clients' eyes," said Mr. Bennett. "Abuse is abuse, trauma is trauma."

For 17 years the centre has provided skilled and effective treatment to individuals and families who have been touched by child sexual abuse, past or present. The new mandate will allow centre staff to offer their knowledge and skills to a larger population.

The major barrier to making an even bigger impact, however, is money. The centre's annual budget of \$300,000 is lean by any standard, especially considering the need that exists throughout the region.

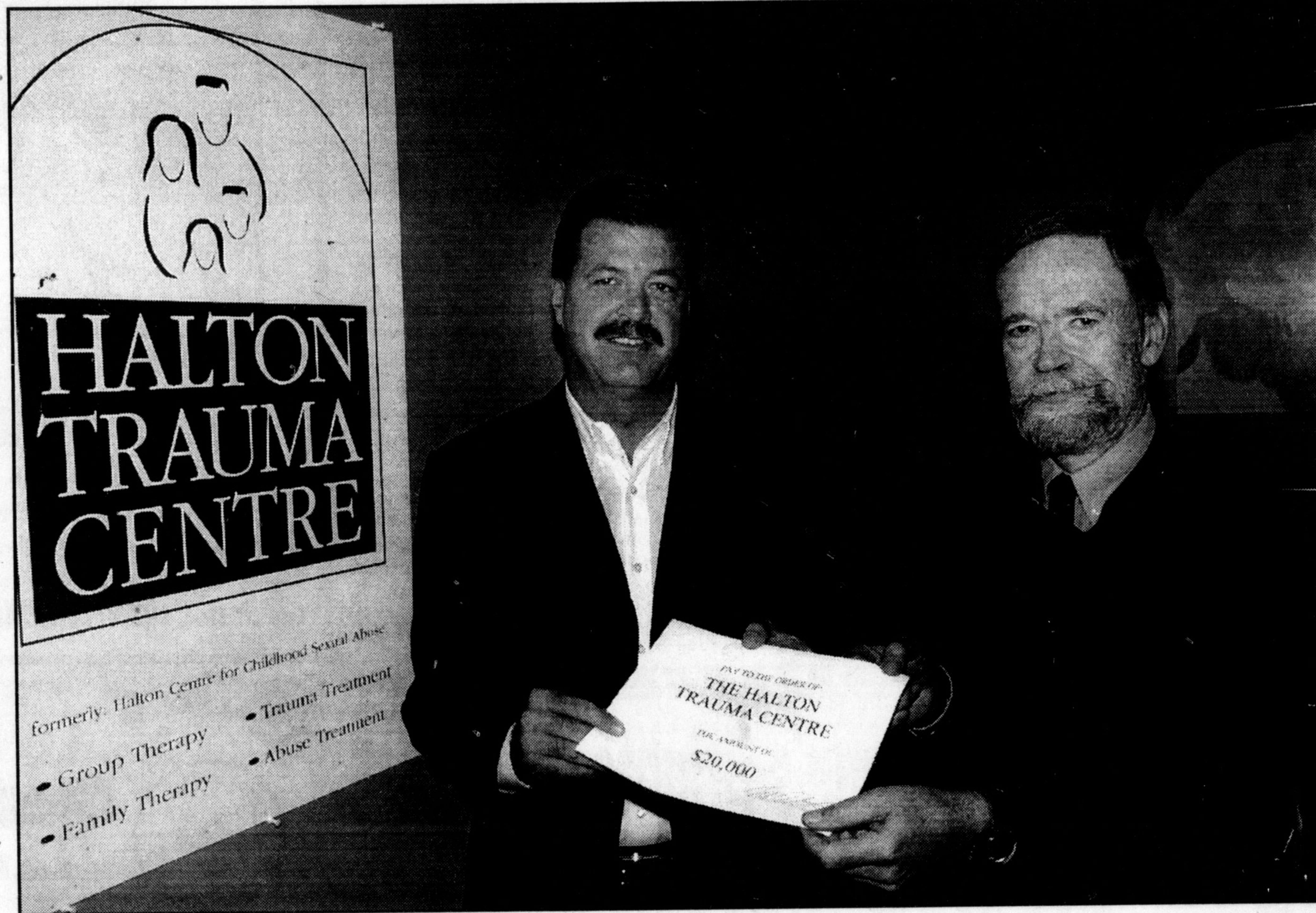
"That imposes real limits on what we can do," said Mr. Bennett, whose tiny office is proof the money is spent on services, not overhead. "We can't keep running this agency without proper funding."

For example, the centre has never been able to provide individual therapy, something which Mr. Bennett described as a "real gap."

"We need to find the revenue to support that," he said. "If it sounds like we're putting our hand out, we damn well are."

Approximately 52 per cent of the centre's budget comes from the Ministry of Community and Social Services, 17 per cent to 20 per cent from Halton's four United Way agencies with the remainder raised by staff. Sometimes, said Mr. Bennett, they just go ahead with projects even when funding isn't available.

"We have a history of reaching out and not let-



Mike DeGroot (left), president of Westbury International Corporation, presents a \$20,000 donation to Paul Bennett, executive director of the Halton Trauma Centre. Faced with limited financial resources for programs, Mr. Bennett was happy to accept the gift.

Photo by BARRIE ERSKINE

ting the money stop us," he said.

Fortunately, the centre received a welcome \$20,000 donation recently from Westbury International Corporation president Michael H. DeGroot, son of Laidlaw founder Michael DeGroot. A Burlington resident, he remains involved with properties and charities in Oakville — none more worthwhile, he said, than those involving children.

"Everyone should have the same chance," said Mr. DeGroot. "This was a great tie-in to help kids have an equal opportunity."

With a paltry budget to work with, Mr. Bennett is delighted by Mr. DeGroot's generosity.

"Hopefully this donation will be the kick-off to finding additional benefactors," he said.

The money will be funneled toward the cen-

tre's three-member Trauma Treatment Team, which works with entire families coping with physical, verbal and sexual abuse and neglect. Like soldiers returning from war, victims of abuse deserve to be taken seriously and treated appropriately, said Mr. Bennett.

Forty per cent of survivors of childhood sexual abuse suffered their trauma when only six months to five years of age, a fact which Mr. Bennett said underscores why their psyches are so damaged. This is especially heart-breaking when one considers that most abuse takes place in the home, not as the result of strangers.

"It strikes at the very heart of what we think about families," said Bennett, who explained that offenders are also counseled.

The money and time spent now is a "profound investment" in the future of not only victims,

said Bennett, but also society at large when one considers the enormous funds spent on everything from addiction to social assistance.

"We lose billions spent dealing with the symptoms but not the reasons why the symptoms are there," said Mr. Bennett.

The focus on sexual abuse for the majority of the centre's existence has allowed staff to develop an in-depth knowledge of the issue, a process of learning that Mr. Bennett said is ongoing.

Now that the centre has "re-designed" itself, Mr. Bennett said he sees 1983 to 1999 as the first chapter, the new mandate as the second.

"We are constantly learning and upgrading," he said. "I'm quite proud of what we've done."

Those seeking the centre's services should call 825-3242. Anyone wishing to donate is encouraged to contact Susan Coyne at 825-5024.

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### COGECO 14 Programming Schedule — June 27th, 2000 - July 3rd, 2000

**Tuesday, June 27th**

10am, 11am, Noon Plugged In!  
Encore  
5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!  
6:00pm Seniors Showcase  
7:00pm The Local Scene  
8:00pm Halton Hills Council & Awards - June 19th

**Wednesday, June 28th**

10am, 11am, Noon Plugged In!  
Encore  
5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!  
6:00pm Cable in the Classroom  
7:00pm Swap Talk - Live!  
8:00pm Cogeco Sports: Flamboro Speedway

**Thursday, June 29th**

10am, 11am, Noon Plugged In!  
Encore  
5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!  
6:00pm The Local Scene  
7:00pm Money Week  
8:00pm Halton Regional Council - June 21st

**Monday, July 3rd**

Canada Day - No Programming

Feature this week: "Cogeco Sports: Flamboro Speedway" - Wednesday, 8pm