

# Cancer Society workers up in arms over office closure

By **CYNTHIA GAMBLE**  
Special to *The Champion*

Prepare for change. That's the message Canadian Cancer Society's (CCS) head office representatives had for more than 200 residents protesting the imminent closure of the Georgetown office at a public meeting August 10 in Halton Hills.

"In anticipation of the board changing their minds, my advice to you is no — start the change," said Brent Chambers, an Ontario division board of directors vice-president.

Barry Timpleck, Georgetown campaign treasurer, said the north Halton unit has the unique distinction of raising the most money per unit for many years running — although that assertion was challenged by the regional reps.

In 1999, the unit raised \$450,000 — \$189,000 (Georgetown), \$203,000 (Milton) and \$57,000 (Acton). Mr. Timpleck estimated the Georgetown branch alone raised about \$250,000 in this year's campaign. Statistically, the north Halton unit raises \$6.11 per capita (compared to Toronto's 18 cents per capita). The cost of running the Georgetown office is \$17,000, he said, but that doesn't include the salary of the part-time staff person.

"This is not a cost-cutting exercise, this is a service improvement exercise," Mr. Chambers said to sustained jeers.

The Ontario division board ordered all part-time offices to close by November 30 and be consolidated into bigger regional offices to provide full-time week-day service. The north Halton unit will be amalgamated with Oakville. The decision-makers looked at geography, population growth and transportation routes and consulted 100,000 Ontario volunteers.

However, none seemed to be from the north Halton unit. "We're insulted that we were not even considered in this 'wise' decision," said Lorrie Kelly-Quinn, Georgetown Cancer Society patient and community services co-ordinator. "Our 'wise' local decision is to stay just as we are."

Dianne Penrice, Georgetown branch president, said 1,100 people have signed a petition requesting a decision reversal and they expect that number to grow to 9,000.

"It comes down to this, the Canadian Cancer Society is withdrawing our support staff, angering our volunteers and demoralizing our community and we will not accept this decision quietly," said Ms Penrice.

That attitude angered Peter Vaudry, who chaired the Single Staffed Unit Task Force. Expecting to meet with only a few volunteers to discuss details of the closure, he and the four other reps were shocked to face an angry capacity crowd.

Self-described as "the villain of the piece," Mr. Vaudry antagonized the audience by stating the local community was "close-minded."

"You formed your opinion before I even got here," he shouted. "If you're not close-minded, than neither am I."

Ms. Vaudry said in 1997 the CCS placed four staff members in single-staffed offices for a two-year pilot program. "We came out of that with the realization that a single-staffed unit doesn't deliver the quality service that a double-staffed unit can," he said.

"If we are going with our mission to eradicate cancer and enhance the quality of life, do we have to have a building for three days a week to do that?"

He got a deafening yes from the audience. "But you haven't proven that to me," he responded. Many audience members left after that comment.

"The unit is not just a building. It is the first place patients and family members look to for reassurance and information when faced with a cancer diagnosis," said Cathy Gerrow, Acton branch president.

"It provides an important place for patients, volunteers and staff to meet in order to access information and provide support. An office in Oakville will not be visible or accessible to the 70,000 residents of north Halton."

Volunteer driver Rita Bairstow pointed out there's no public transportation to and from Oakville.

"If the office is closed in Georgetown, what personal contact will the patients have," asked Ms Bairstow. "This is really the big fear that this whole meeting is about tonight is the lack of personal contact for the patients."

However, regional director Sharie Mulkewich pointed out provincially more people are using the 1-800 telephone services rather than support groups.

"Maybe the culture of Georgetown is a little different. We need to look at that," Ms Mulkewich.

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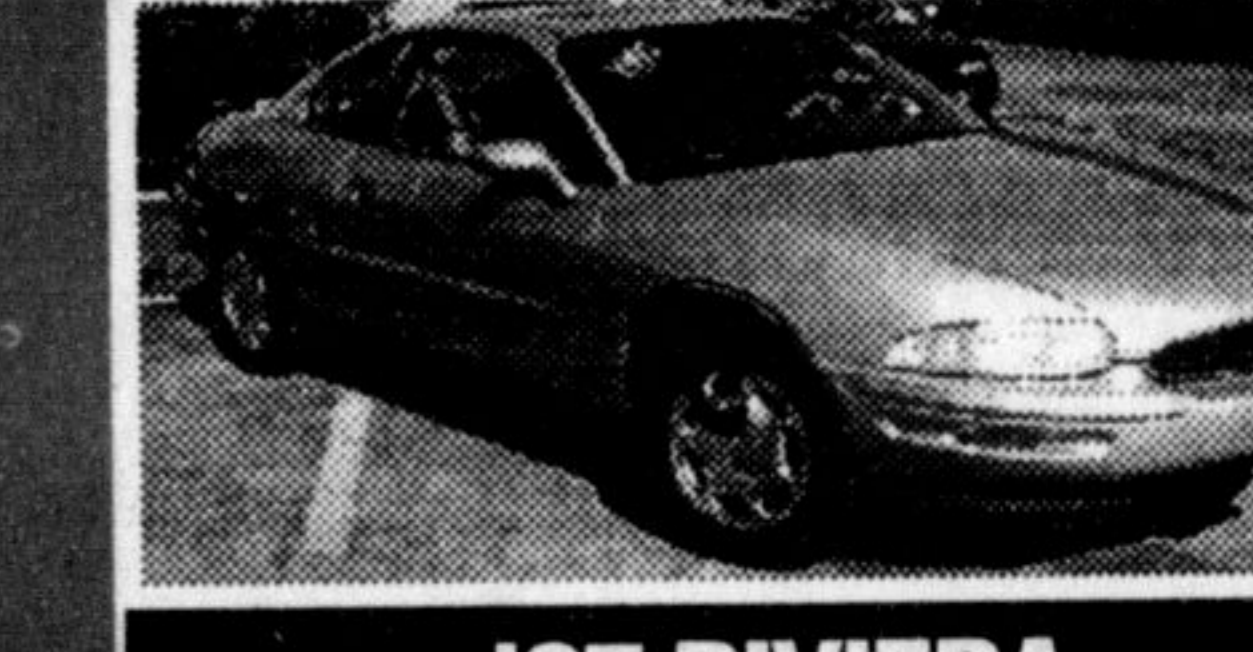
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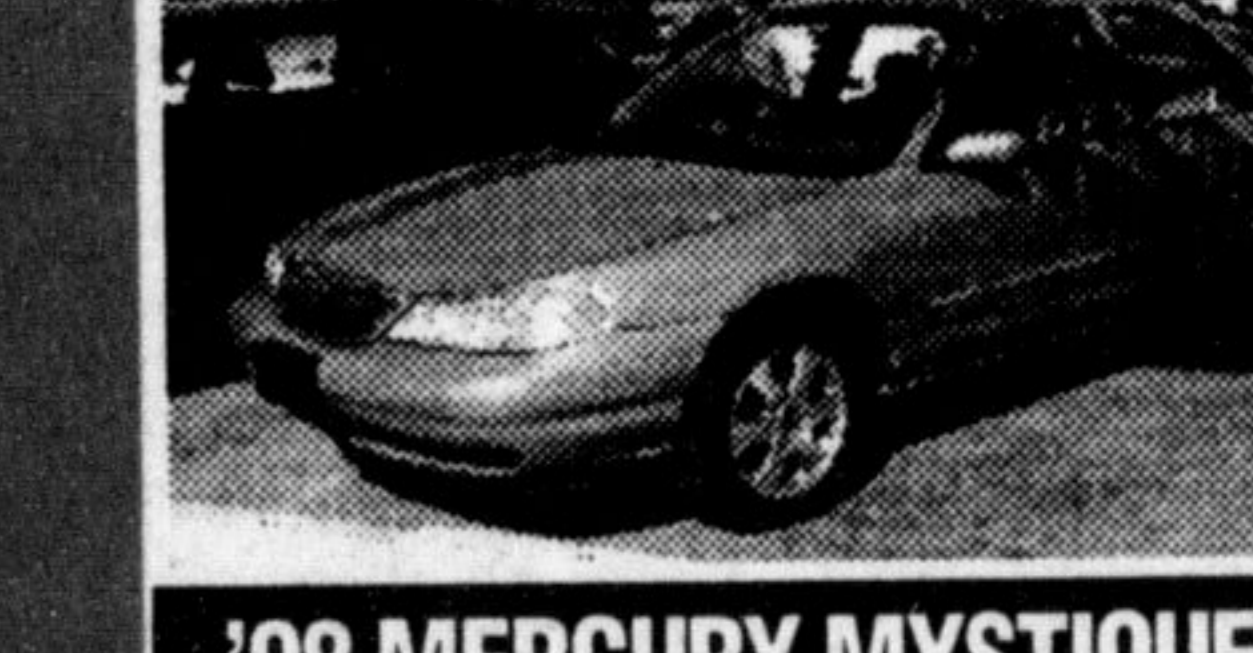
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