

Milton Means Business

Local business appeals your property taxes

By **CARRIE BRUNET**

The Champion

Everyone wants to save money on their tax bill, and Milton's Fred Louks has made a business out of showing people how.

A former employee of the provincial property assessment office, the Ontario Property Assessment Corporation, Mr. Louks knows the system inside and out.

He was contracted for a two-year period while the Province was reassessing property values, and dealt with taxpayers appealing their assessments.

"I reduced my own taxes substantially," Mr. Louks said, without quoting a figure.

In a time when communities are cutting back services, he said he feels it's inappropriate for taxes to be rising.

"What's the difference between what you have to pay tax wise and the services the community is offering?" he questioned.

Through his new business, Property Assessment Services, Mr. Louks helps people who think their property was assessed at too high a value.

"In the assessment system, one formula was designed to fit all

properties," he said. "It can't be all things to all people."

Mr. Louks decided to start his business out of frustration for people who couldn't beat the system.

He had seen residents have their appeal refused because they appeared before the tribunal, without all the documents they need to support their case.

"A lot of times these are senior citizens, the per centage of our population that can least afford the tax hikes," he said. "It's sad to see them spend all that time before the tribunal and be turned down."

Initial meeting

During an initial meeting, Mr. Louks will review the property assessment and determine if it's worthwhile for the taxpayer to proceed with an appeal process.

"That way, they don't spend their money and I don't waste my time for nothing," Mr. Louks said.

To proceed with the appeal process, Mr. Louks charges \$250, plus 50 per cent of the first year's tax savings, if the appeal is successful.

"That's a savings that you'll have every year while you own that home," he said.

Although he doesn't guarantee a tax drop, Mr. Louks boasts a success rate of about 90 per cent.

While he has had a booming clientele from the Oakville and

Burlington areas, he still hasn't reached the Milton market.

"I don't know if it's complacency, or people are satisfied with the status quo," he said.

He warns that as Milton grows, taxes are likely to climb also, adding that the deadline for contesting property assessments is March 31.

And though it's possible for an individual to appeal their assessment on their own, Mr. Louks said it can be intimidating.

"You're dealing with a bureaucracy, it's not the easiest thing to do," he said. "People are confused and confounded by the system."

The key to having the property assessment lowered is to find documents, such as other assessments for similar properties assessed at lower rates, that support the claim.

While homeowners are entitled to see six assessments for properties similar to their homes, Mr. Louks said it's unlikely they will find assessments to support their case among these six.

Through his database, Mr. Louks is able to search the Toronto Real Estate Board, and other provincial networks to find assessments that would be physically similar to those of his clients, but assessed at a much lower rate.

"You have to prove that an error has been made. You have to support it with documents."

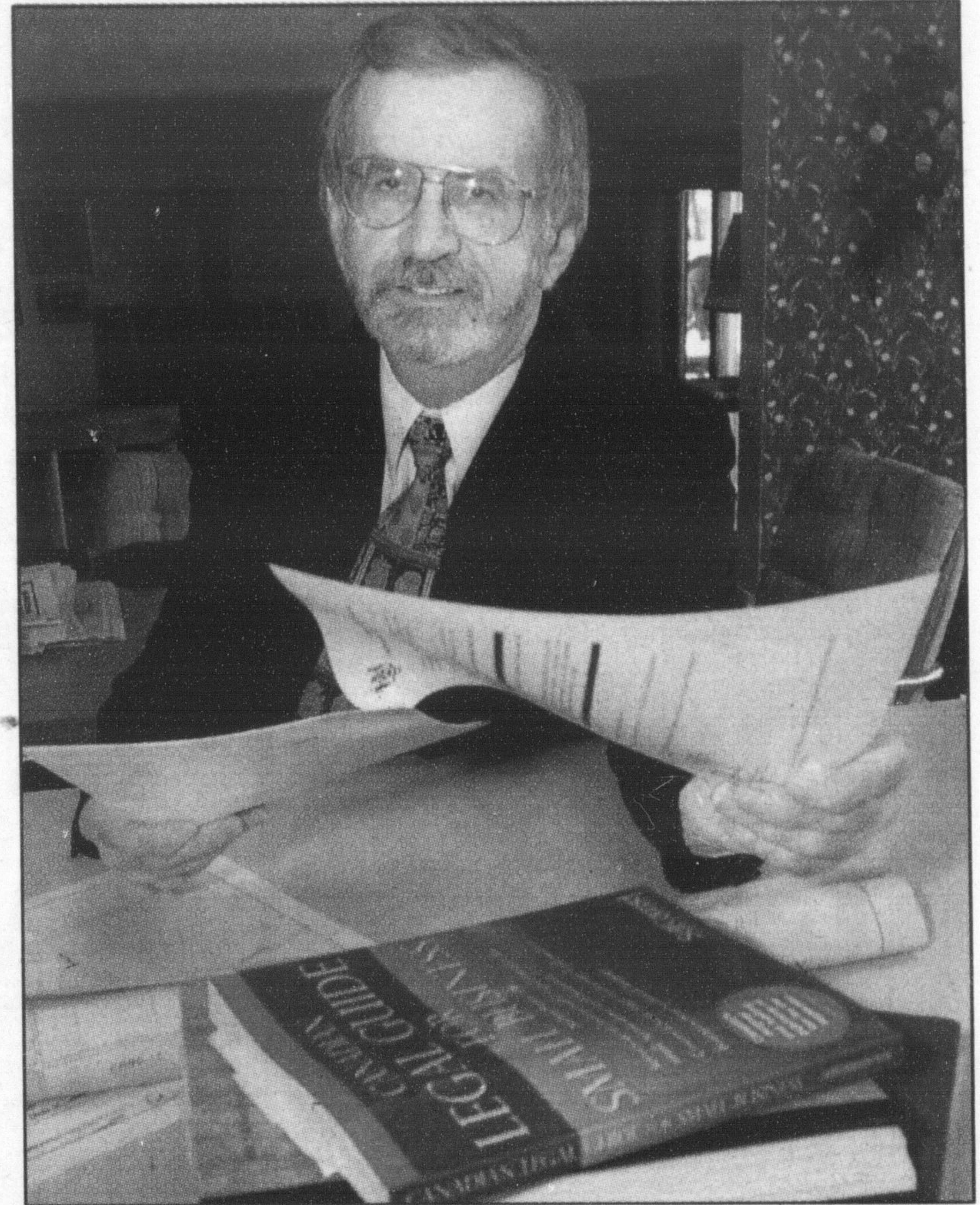


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Milton resident Fred Louks has made a business of telling people how to save money on their property taxes. Property Assessment Services assists people who feel their property was assessed at too high a value.

Are you outstanding in business?

Do you know of any outstanding businessmen or women? If so, Junior Achievement of Halton wants to hear from you.

Nominations are currently being accepted for the 2001 Halton Business Hall of Fame. The Halton Business Hall of Fame originated in May 1999, in conjunction with Halton Region to draw attention to the contributions of local entrepreneurs.

Candidates must own or operate

a business in Halton. They will be judged on their contributions to improving products, processes, efficiencies and human relations of business.

Nominations must include a resume or personal biography of the candidate, as well as information covering each of the judging criteria. Only residents or workers in Halton can place a nomination.

The closing date for nominations is noon, January 31.

All nominees will be contacted by Junior Achievement of Halton and laureates will be confirmed no later than March 2.

Induction into the Hall of Fame is scheduled for May 17.

Nominations can be sent to: Chair, Selection Committee — 2001 Halton Business Hall of Fame, c/o Junior Achievement of Halton, 560 Guelph Line, Burlington Ont., L7R 3M4. Direct faxes to (905) 637-5823.

Scholarship is up for grabs

The Milton branch of Padgett Business Services offers a \$500 scholarship to a graduating high school student whose parent owns and operates a small business.

To be eligible for the scholarship, students must be a dependent of a small business owner, who employs less than 20 people.

The candidate must also own 10 per cent

of the capital stock in the company and participate in the day-to-day operations.

Applicants must submit a 100-word essay describing their education and career plans.

Applications for the scholarship can be obtained by calling Padgett Business Services at 693-8777.

The deadline for applying is March 1.

Helping save lives

Captain Bruno Castonguay coordinates air rescue for the Canadian Forces. He and his colleagues and partners help Canadians in danger. They respond around the clock to emergencies on land or at sea and help save lives. This is just one of the hundreds of services provided by the Government of Canada.

For more information on government services:

- Visit the **Service Canada Access Centre** nearest you
- Visit www.canada.gc.ca
- Call **1 800 O-Canada (1 800 622-6232)**
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