

Parking will no longer be free at Milton hospital

Many people upset over decision, but hospital says move necessary because of budgetary constraints

By FANNIE SUNSHINE

The Champion

Beginning next month, visitors to Milton District Hospital (MDH) will have to pay to park, a decision that has outraged some local residents.

The new parking system, which will be meter-operated at a flat rate charge of \$4, was necessary due to tough financial times, said Allan Halls, senior vice-president of Halton Healthcare Services (HHS).

"The issue of paid parking at MDH has been a topic of discus-

"To come to the Milton hospital after 30 years and have to pay for parking feels like the last straw to urban sprawl."

ELIZABETH KIDDLE

sion for several years," he said. "HHS is currently facing serious budgetary constraints. The decision to move forward with this initiative is inevitable."

HHS forecasts an \$8 million shortfall in funding for 2002-03.

"We're going to be producing much-needed revenues," Mr. Halls continued. "The decision to implement paid parking is a combination of inflation, growth and underfunding from the min-

istry."

He said he believes MDH is the only full-service community hospital in the GTA that has free parking.

"Now we're joining the ranks of other hospitals. If you're just dropping someone off there won't be a fee and volunteers with the auxiliary won't have to pay for parking."

But Milton's Elizabeth Kiddle, who heard about the new parking fee from friends who work at the hospital, said she's sickened over the parking fees.

"I don't know the amount they will be charging and I don't care," the No. 5 Sideroad resident told The Champion. "It's like oh my God, what are they going to do next? To come to the Milton hospital after 30 years and have to pay for parking feels like the last straw to urban sprawl."

When told the flat rate parking fee will be \$4, Ms Kiddle said it would add up over time.

"When hospital staff told me Milton was one of the only hospitals in the GTA to have free parking, I thought good for Milton. We don't have to join the urban trend."

Although Fiona MacPherson of Pitfield Road believes \$4 is reasonable for parking, she said she feels regular visitors to the hospital should receive a discount.

"I understand it's almost inevitable that we have to pay fees but a person visiting their parents everyday shouldn't have to pay the full amount."

Hornby resident Karl Retzer said he believes parking at the hospital should remain free.

"Most of the people who use the hospital are elderly. They're hitting the people with the least disposable income who can't afford \$4 every time they go. They ain't young millionaires. If the hospital is in desperate need of funding they should be going after the government."

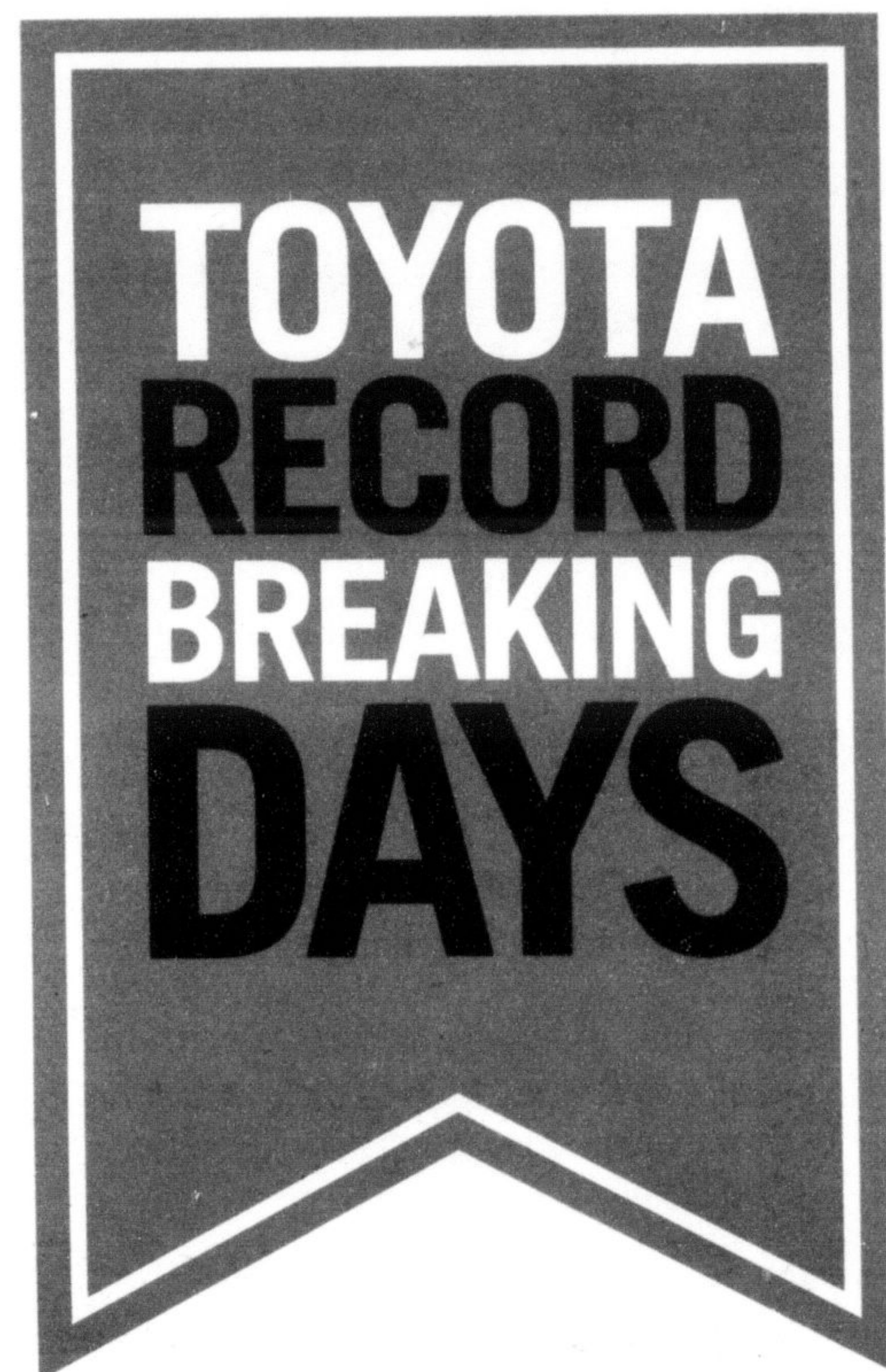
The cost of implementing the new parking system — which will include gates, signage and barriers — will cost \$150,000.

The annual revenue is estimated at \$320,000, Mr. Halls said.


An additional 30 parking spaces will be added to the staff parking lot for visitor use, he said.

Staff will be deducted for parking through payroll, Mr. Halls said.

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