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A Metroland Community Newspaper Vol. 143 No. 73 Tuesday, November 26, 2002 40 Pages \$1.00 (GST included)

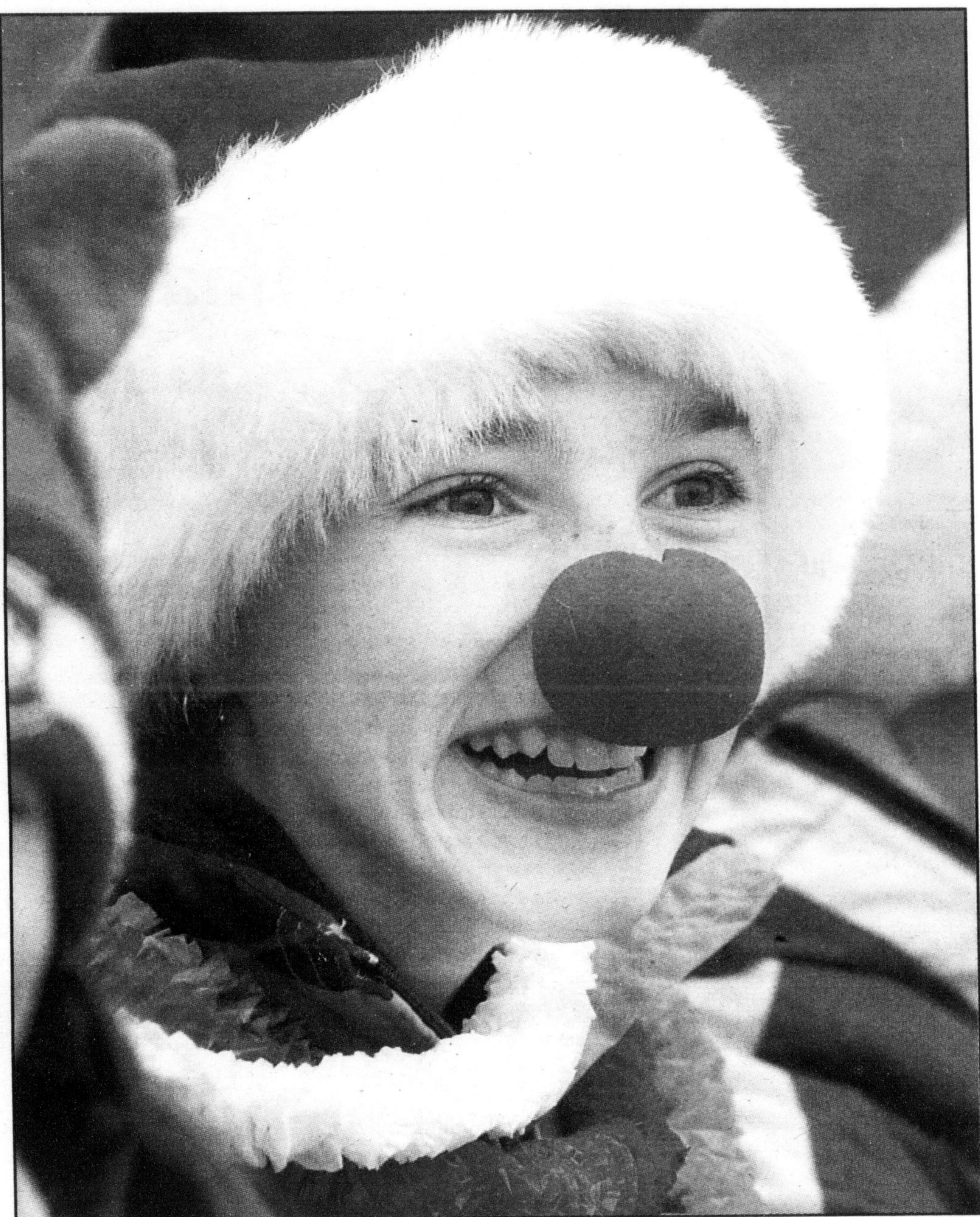


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Real nose for a parade

Cailey Robertson, 11, takes in Sunday's Milton Santa Claus Parade along Main Street while decked out in a red nose and santa hat. The annual event drew thousands to downtown Milton. See more parade photos and information on the Community Page.

Halton police seek almost 9 per cent budget increase

By HOWARD MOZEL
Special to The Champion

The Halton Regional Police Services Board begrudgingly approved an operating budget calling for an 8.95 per cent spending increase Thursday.

In passing the service's \$61.7-million 2003 budget, board members made it clear to Police Chief Ean Algar that efficiencies must be found within the organization or else budgets will continue to escalate and double-digit increases will become the norm.

"We're going to have to make some choices about where we're going in the future," said board member and Burlington Councillor John Taylor.

Chief Algar said he couldn't agree more, adding that his agency is constantly seeking and implementing ways to stretch every dollar. Trouble is, a host of mandatory and prescriptive legislation — coupled with spiraling growth and the demands of the public — make this harder every year.

"We have an excellent police service, but the future's going to be challenging," said Chief Algar, who takes pride in the fact Halton remains the safest community in Canada with a population of 100,000 or more.

Particularly vexing to both Chief Algar and the board, however, is the costs involved in transporting prisoners to court, protecting courthouses and dealing with more than 400 criminal offenses a year at Milton's Maplehurst Correctional Facility. These duties amount to more than \$2-million worth of duties that should be handled and paid for by the Province, said board member Keith Bird.

In the 2003 budget alone, the chief is asking for an \$853,400 increase for court services. When Maplehurst expands yet again next year to house 1,600 inmates, the number of their offences will jump and so will the drain on police resources.

"Policing is policing and this is just security," said board member Jack Brewer. "We need police officers on the street doing police work."

Milton and Regional Councillor Richard Malboeuf, who sat in on his first meeting as a board member Thursday, asked what the consequences would be if Halton police simply refused to provide court security.

Mr. Taylor explained that some judges have said they would supersede the chief's discretion laid out in the Police Act and hold him in contempt.

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