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Councillors accuse each other of using defibrillators as timely political move

By **JASON MISNER**

The Champion

Some Milton politicians have accused each other of using the issue of deploying defibrillators in Town buildings as a political football in the run-up to the November 10 municipal election.

Last week representatives from Halton Region's health department made a presentation to town council about setting up defibrillators — life-saving medical equipment that provides a shock to kick-start the heart — in various Town facilities.

The Region would act as the coordinator to get the program started and the Town would pay for acquiring the defibrillators and to train people on how to use them.

Blake Hurst, Halton's CPR program coordinator, told council that ideally Milton could have 25 or 26 defibrillators in places like arenas and the leisure centre to help increase survival rates following the onset of cardiac arrest.

The cost for the machines is estimated at around \$180,000, which includes training time.

None of the councillors were against the notion of deploying defibrillators, but were struggling with determining when and how funding should be made available for them.

Wards 2 and 4 Regional Councillor Rick Malboeuf, who's running for mayor, put on the table a motion to have the Town start part of the program this year. It was suggested slot reserves could cover the costs. He said he was shocked after Mr. Hurst pointed out that 35 people in Ontario go into cardiac arrest a day and that the use of defibrillators in the early stages of cardiac arrest increases the chances to survive.

Mr. Malboeuf said afterwards that he felt there was an immediate need to get defibrillators out into the community. Waiting, he said "would be putting our residents unnecessarily at risk."

Council voted against Mr. Malboeuf's motion to get defibrillators into Milton facilities right away, citing the need for more information about on-going training, the maintenance of the machines and if the Region will provide future funding.

But after the meeting, Mr. Malboeuf said he thinks those who voted against his motion did so because they support Mayor Gord Krantz's pursuit of re-election.

"The senior members of council commonly referred to as the old boys club voted as a block to delay this project," he said. "Those who voted against it are the ones voting for the mayor."

However, Ward 4 Councillor John Challinor stressed to councillors that everyone is on side with defibrillators, but suggested Mr. Malboeuf's urgency to get them into the community is more about politics. "Politicizing anybody's health, I don't like at all," he said of Mr. Malboeuf's motion.

A report will come to town council October 20 outlining how the defibrillator program could be implemented next year based on the 2004 budget. Mr. Hurst told councillors that between January of 2001 and March of 2003 in Milton paramedics received 37 VSA calls — vital signs absent — and not one person survived. Ambulance service is a regional responsibility.

"It's not unrealistic to think that we could go from a zero for 37 to a 20 per cent survival rate," he said with a defibrillator program.

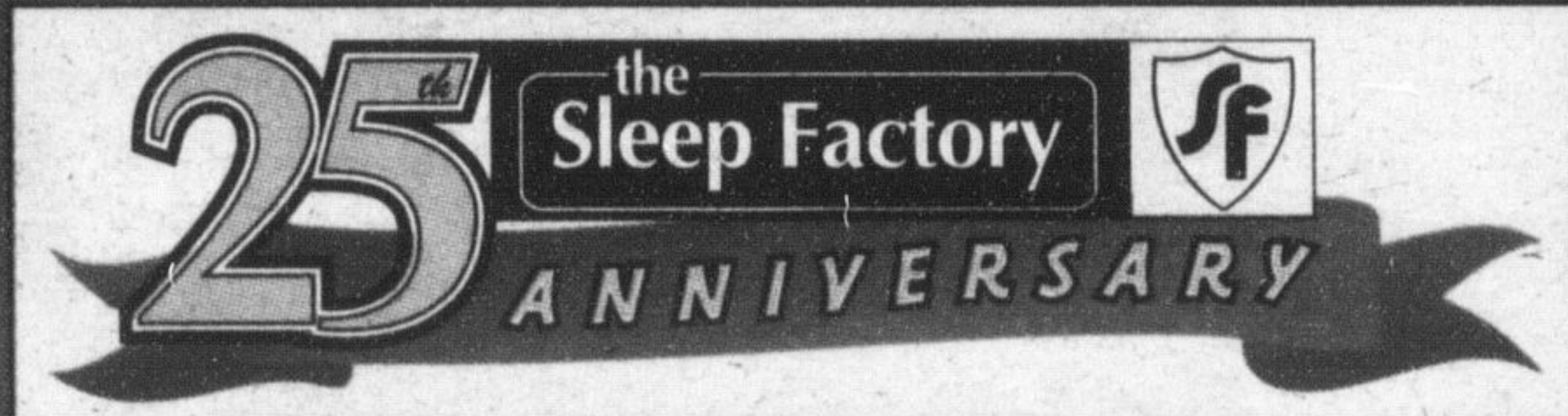
Mr. Hurst said later the other regional municipalities will be contacted about the defibrillator program.

Fire Chief Harold Penson said in an interview he would love the program to start as soon as possible, but that it's council's decision when to start it and how to fund it. What still needs to be determined, he said, is if there will be funding from the Region for the program should the Town take it on.

Also, he said the Town would need to hire a new staff person to co-ordinate the defibrillator program because of the workload it would require, like training the appropriate people on how to use it and doing consistent equipment safety checks.

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Container gardening continues to grow in popularity and changing the planters with each new season is what makes container gardening so much fun. For the fall season the most popular plant to add is the fall mum for its great fall colour. Mums aren't all there are though. Asters, purple fountain grass, pansies and a number of perennials and ornamental grasses can help add that special flare to your favourite container. Try something different by adding corn stalks, Indian corn or grape vine wreaths.

The possibilities are bounded only by your imagination, so it's time to get creative. Drop by one of our garden centres this week, check out the fabulous selection of pottery and urns, pick up your plant material and accents and build that fall excitement for your home.

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