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Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Derry Road resident Mark Alford can't believe the damage to his vehicle as well as his home (inset), which had part of its roof torn off when a tree came crashing down Wednesday.

High winds topple trees, cause damage to homes

By STEPHANIE THIESSEN
The Champion

Mark Alford was standing in his bathroom Wednesday morning when he heard a loud whirring sound.

He assumed it was a large aircraft flying overhead, but was proven wrong when he heard a large crash, felt the floor jump and watched as bits of plaster fell from the ceiling.

He soon stood outside his Derry Road home — built as a one-room schoolhouse — looking at a century old cottonwood tree whose trunk had snapped about 10 feet off the ground and crashed into the house.

"It was the power of the wind," Mr. Alford said.

Fortunately, his wife and two children weren't home at the time.

The tree also flattened Mr.

Alford's S250 Super Duty Ford pick-up truck, which he endearingly called "the Cadillac of trucks."

"It's very disappointing," Mr. Alford said of the damage, fighting back emotions in an interview shortly after the incident. "I'm here and my family's safe, but it takes all you work hard on..."

Mr. Alford was one of scores of Miltonians forced to cope with Wednesday's strong winds.

Milton Hydro vice-president of operations Richard Murray said the wind caused several power outages Wednesday when it knocked trees into hydro wires.

Milton Hydro received a number of calls from individuals without power, he said. There was also a large black-out along Regional Road 25 from about Chisholm Drive to the High Point industrial park area north of Hwy. 401.

"The power was out for a short

time until we removed the tree from the line," Mr. Murray said.

Lynda Vermaas also had a tree that came crashing down, damaging the fence of her Kingsleigh Court home.

Part of the willow tree — which was located behind her backyard — now rests on a phone line, and Ms Vermaas said she's waiting for the right people to clean up the situation.

"But that's not all.

"My neighbour's TV mast broke and is now on our side of the roof," she said.

Tim Roberts, Milton Fire Department's training co-ordinator, said the station received a call about hydro lines that were down in the Puslinch area, but Guelph firefighters responded. There were no other incidents, he said.

Stephanie Thiessen can be reached at sthiessen@milton-canadianchampion.com.

Martin St. School saved by the bell

By TIM WHITNELL
Special to The Champion

Martin Street School has been saved by the bell.

The Halton District School Board has closed the book on all of its pending school closure studies in Milton, Burlington and Oakville.

Education Director Dusty Papke cited election promises made by Ontario's new Liberal government, to revise the education funding formula, as the rationale for his recommendation that school closure/consolidation studies involving 13 elementary schools be halted.

Sighs of relief and "thank yous" were audible from many of the parents who attended Wednesday's school board meeting where trustees voted unanimously to end closure studies being conducted around the region.

The board's ruling means closure studies that were entering the stretch run, with decisions expected in November, are now non-existent.

In addition to Martin Street, schools saved from closure/consolidation discussion include one school in Burlington and 11 in Oakville.

On a recommendation from Oakville Trustee Drew Currah, the board also will send a letter to new Premier Dalton McGuinty detailing its situation regarding school accommodation and asking for direction regarding the government's intentions on education funding.

Mr. Papke said he spoke recently with some government officials and is convinced the new government's education policies will allow the Halton board to continue to build new schools but, if not, its cash flow for such capital projects still will remain positive for at least a year.

"If they (government) come through on even one of their promises, we will be able to build new schools without having to close any," he said.

The Liberals have promised to cap classes at 20 students in the primary grades, meaning more space, and teachers, will be needed for the extra classes created, hence schools currently underutilized may need their open space in the near future.

The dilemma for some of Ontario's public and Catholic school boards since the funding formula was introduced in 1996,

said Mr. Papke, is that all surplus pupil capacity has had to be eliminated in older communities in order to qualify for provincial funds to build new schools in growing areas.

While happy as anyone to make the announcement about the end of current closure studies, Mr. Papke offered a caution to parents.

"These motions will not preclude closing schools or having closure studies" in the future, if warranted, he noted.

In Martin Street's situation, the board is waiting for the Town of Milton to make final decisions on the massive Sherwood Survey residential development, a determination of the future development in north-west Milton and an assessment of the ability of Martin Street to meet the needs of the community in terms of available pupil places.

A final report on Martin Street had been prepared just the day before Wednesday's momentous board meeting.

In that six-page report, board Superintendent Al Greyson said the recommendation of the Martin Street closure/consolidation committee was to close the JK to grade 5 French immersion facility in June 2004 and send its English-stream students to J.M. Denyes School.

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