

# Halton in good position to lure new business: Region

By **JASON MISNER**  
*The Champion*

Economic development officials say Milton, and the rest of Halton for that matter, shouldn't face great difficulties in attracting new industries despite hundreds of job losses and a few plant closures over the past several months.

Milton's economic development officer Andrew Siltala and Halton's director of business development John Ayling insist municipalities are well positioned to lure businesses for a number of reasons, including location to key transportation networks like highways and rail lines, servicing capacity and available employment lands.

"There is a lot of inquiries and interest in Halton region," said Mr. Ayling, whose duties include working with the four municipalities and businesses looking to locate here.

O-I Canada, a 300,000-square-foot glass manufacturing plant on Chisholm Drive, closed its doors December 29, putting 150 people out of work. The reason for the closure was based on poor sales of O-I products and the \$18 million needed to upgrade the 23-year-old plant.

It's the latest business closure, but not the only one to hit the region in the last while.

In September, it was announced 350 people will be out of work when Petro Canada closes its Oakville refinery in December. And in July, the 10-year-old Bristol Circle Lear Oakville plant closed. It affected 444 people who worked at the plant that manufactured the seats for the Ford Windstar.

Combining closures from O-I, Lear and Petro Canada, the job losses equal a steep 944.

Mr. Siltala said Milton will be working closely with the real estate agent trying to sell the 10-plus acre O-I property.

Colliers International will be the agent in charge, said company spokesperson Sara Theis from O-I's Toledo, Ohio headquarters.

"There hasn't been a trend in Milton at all to see closures like that," Mr. Siltala said, referring to O-I. "We will work with potential users for the building."

What's important to note, he said, is the O-I closure was for organizational reasons and wasn't a reflection of Milton as a viable business location. "It's a structural change that company is going through."

Mr. Ayling said he will work with O-I officials and the local union with its drop-in centre designed to help employees find a job. Generally, Halton uses the

Greater Toronto Marketing Alliance to show off the region and its four municipalities.

"We work with the provincial government to work to attract new industry," Mr. Ayling said. "Milton is in a very positive light right now because of its location."

That includes the busy Hwy. 401, which cuts through town, and the close proximity of Hwy. 407, the QEW and a rail transfer station near Derry and Trafalgar roads.

Milton's strength as an attractive site for industry can be seen by at least three recent examples, Mr. Siltala said. Mid-last year it was announced Smurfit-MBI, a producer of specialty packaging, would open a 255,000-square-foot plant.

Also, Parker Hannifin Canada announced it will build a new 137,000-square-foot manufacturing, storage and administrative building. It's a leading manufacturer of motion and control technologies and systems for commercial, industrial and aerospace markets. They helped Milton secure a record-year in industrial-commercial-institutional land sales, of more than 693,000 square feet in 2003.

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## Robberies connected?

Police are investigating the possibility that one person is responsible for two armed robberies in Halton last week.

Police say a man walked into an Esso gas station at Guelph Line and Derry Road Thursday at 3:10 a.m. The clerk told police the suspect was armed with a knife and demanded cash. Police say the suspect received an undisclosed amount of money and fled the store on foot.

Halton police say a similar robbery took place last Tuesday at a Mac's Milk variety store in Milton.

The suspect is described as a white male, about six feet, 200 lbs. He was wearing a black hooded sweatshirt with a light-coloured stripe down its sleeve.

Anyone with information is asked to call (905) 634-1831 or Crime Stoppers of Halton at (905) 825-8477.

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