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Derby Brown

Hospital must double in size to meet future needs of town, says chief operating officer

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**
The Champion

In the past year-and-a-half, eight new family physicians have set up shop in Milton — and one more will be arriving this year — thanks to the physician recruiting committee.

That's one of the steps the hospital has already been taken to deal with Milton's burgeoning population, said Cindy McDonell, chief operating officer of

Milton District Hospital.

Ms McDonell was at Hugh Foster Hall January 8 speaking to the Milton branch of the Canadian Federation of University Women about the challenges the hospital is currently experiencing and the ways it's planning to deal with the expanding population.

Ms McDonell explained that the population increase that started about seven years ago means the hospital Milton used to

know is no longer adequate.

"From 1987 to 1997, we had a community that didn't grow at all," she said. "It was a wonderful, stable environment to work in. Now, with the explosive population growth, there's a gap at the hospital (between what it provides and what it needs to provide)."

In efforts to bridge the gap, a physician recruitment committee was created a few years ago, resulting in six family physi-

cians who're currently accepting new patients. There are now a total of 23 family physicians practicing in Milton, up from the 14 physicians there were when the recruiting team began several years ago. At that time, there were no Milton physicians accepting new patients.

Also, there are now three obstetricians in Milton, filling the equivalent of two full-time positions. That's something to celebrate, said Ms McDonell, considering the obstetrics unit had to be closed twice in the past three years, forcing pregnant Milton women to deliver at Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital. Last year, 300 babies were delivered at Milton District Hospital, Ms McDonell said.

The hospital is in the preliminary stages of a necessary facility expansion, Ms McDonell told the group. But, she said, there are still ministry approvals to gain before the planning is put into action.

The hospital is currently about 100,000 square feet but needs to at least double in size to meet what Milton's population will be by 2016. Fortunately, she said, there's no want of land. The hospital sits on 29 acres of land, most of it unused.

That means that while the hospital is expanding, it can remain operational.

Some of the services that need to expand include ambulatory care, diagnostic imaging and rehabilitation. Mental health care will also be needed as the population increases, Ms McDonell said.

As to when the needed expansion might happen, nobody knows. Ms McDonell said the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is aware of the intent to expand, but it isn't known how long it might take to get approval.

Ward 4 Councillor Wendy Schau said she's pleased Milton District Hospital has the land needed to expand. "It's great that we have that opportunity. The hospital is an important thing to Milton, and I hear how proud (residents) are," she said.

Maureen Martin moved to Milton eight years ago and said having a hospital she felt comfortable with was a big factor in her decision to move here.

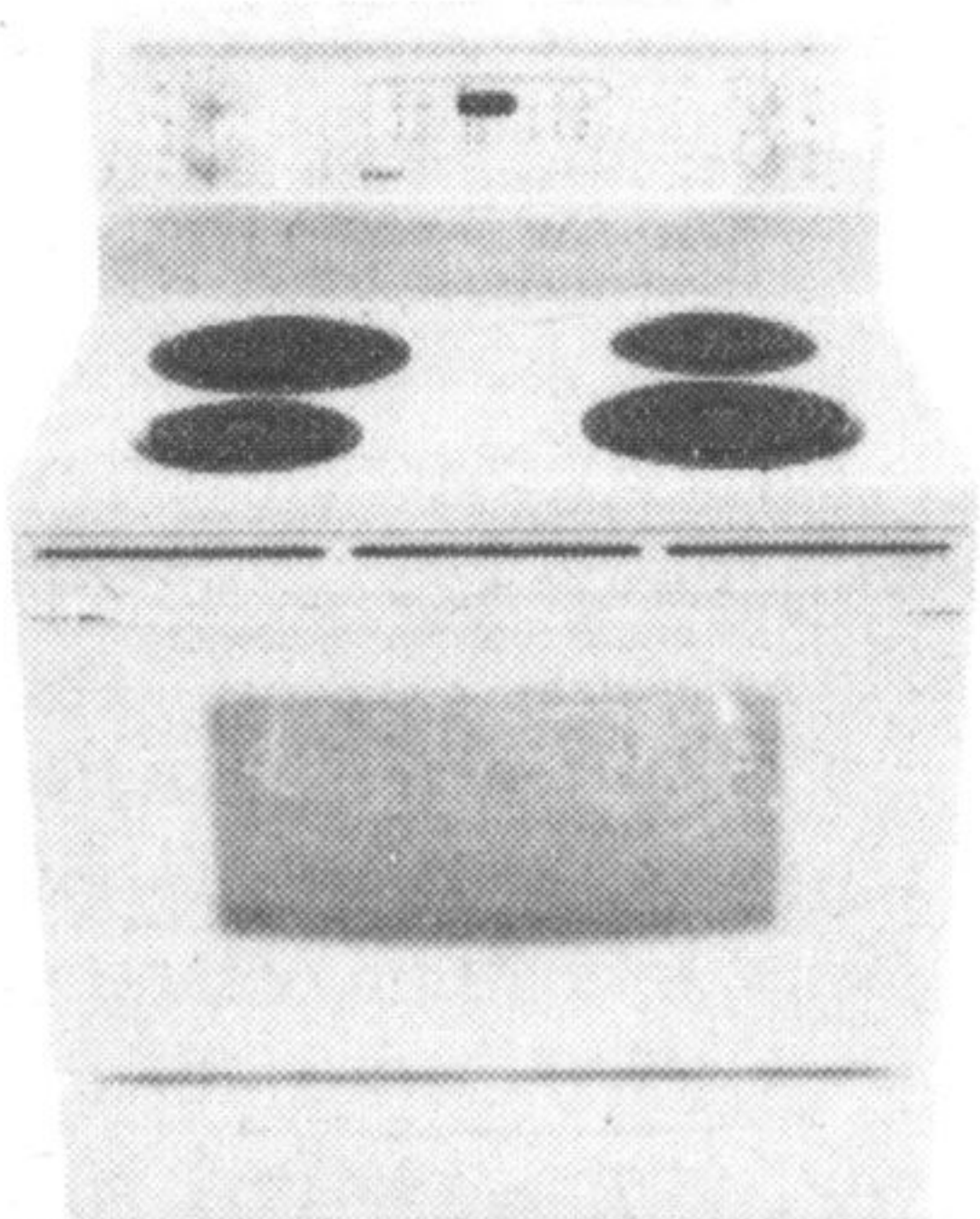
"It's tremendously important to have a good hospital," Ms Martin concluded.

Stephanie Thiessen can be reached at sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

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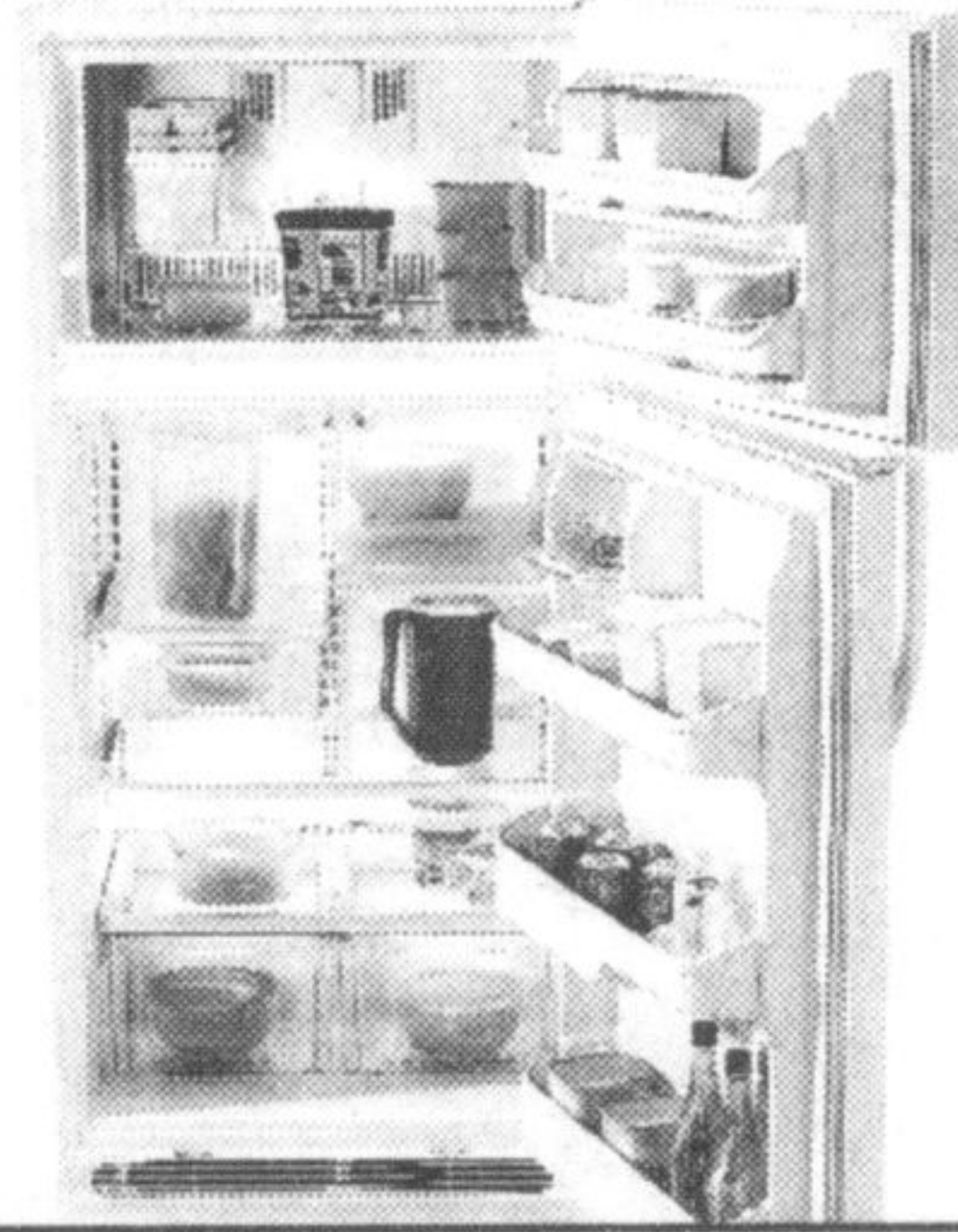


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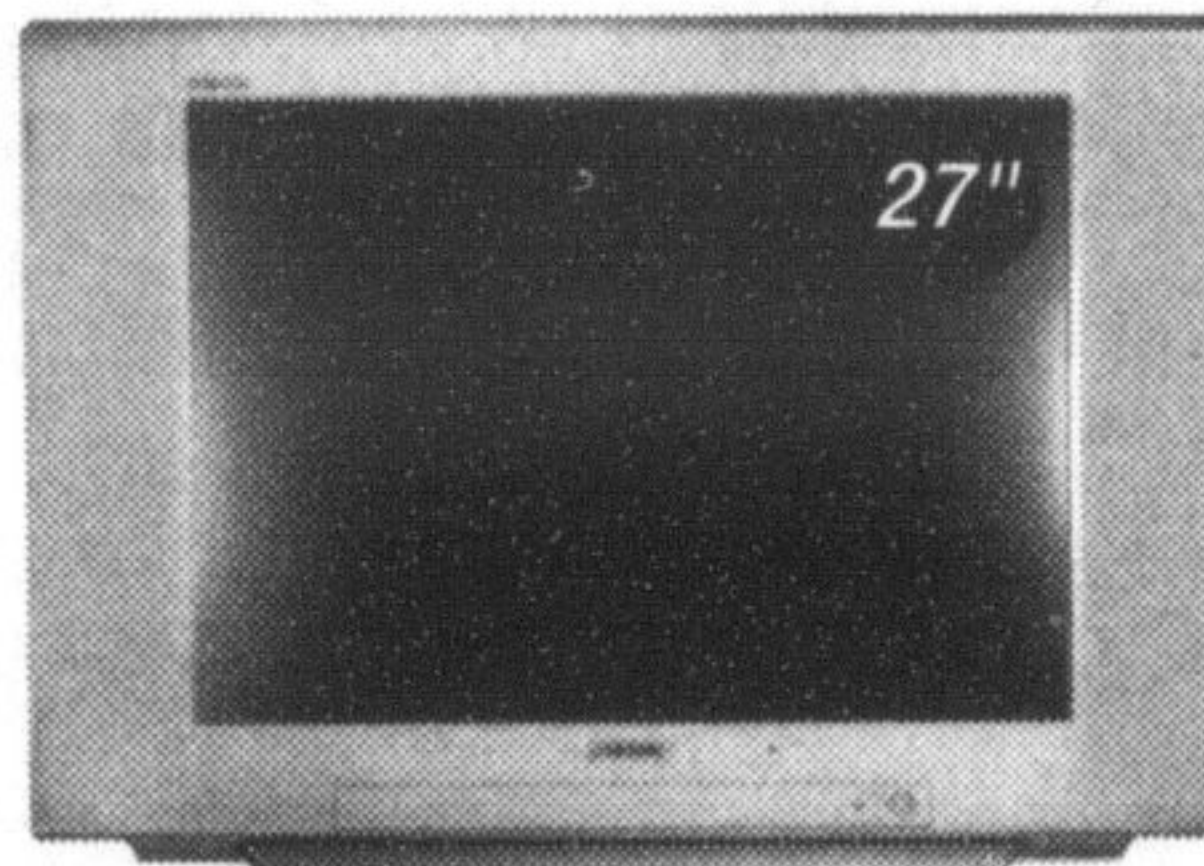
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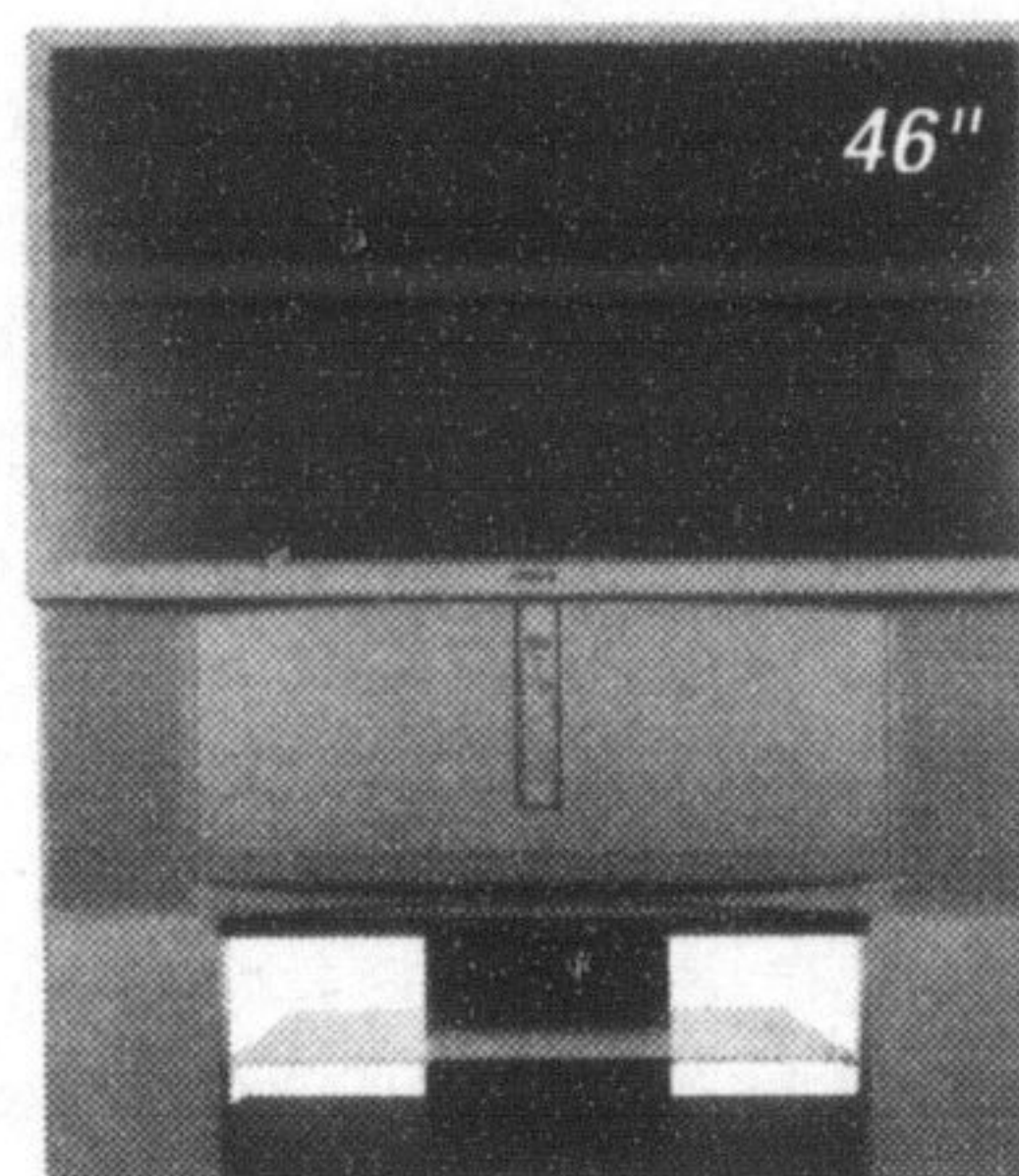
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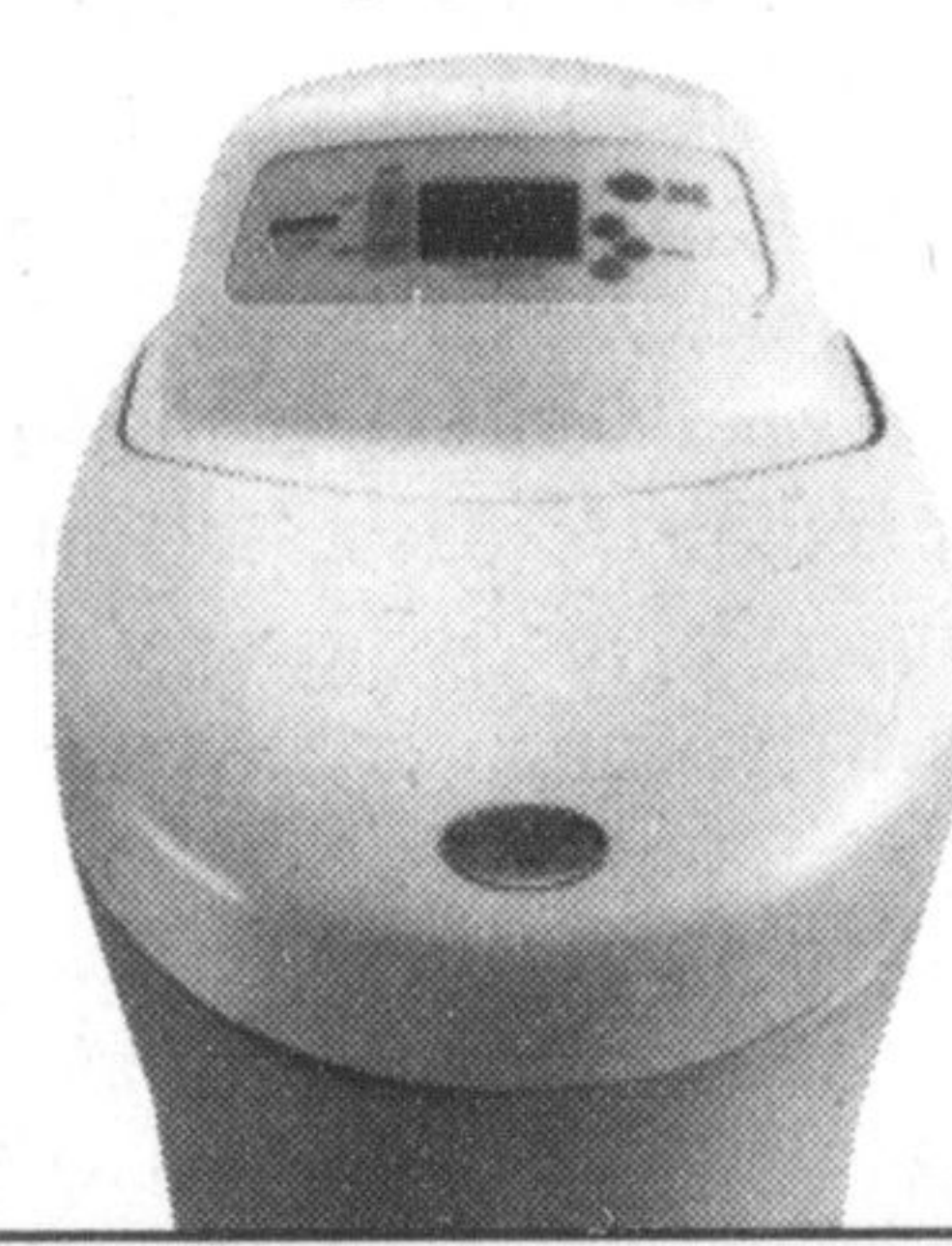
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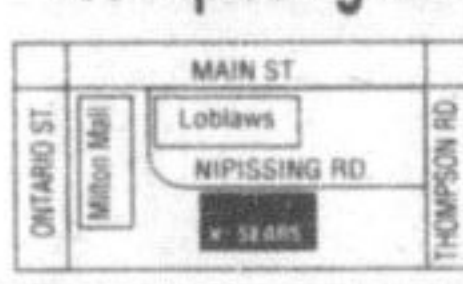
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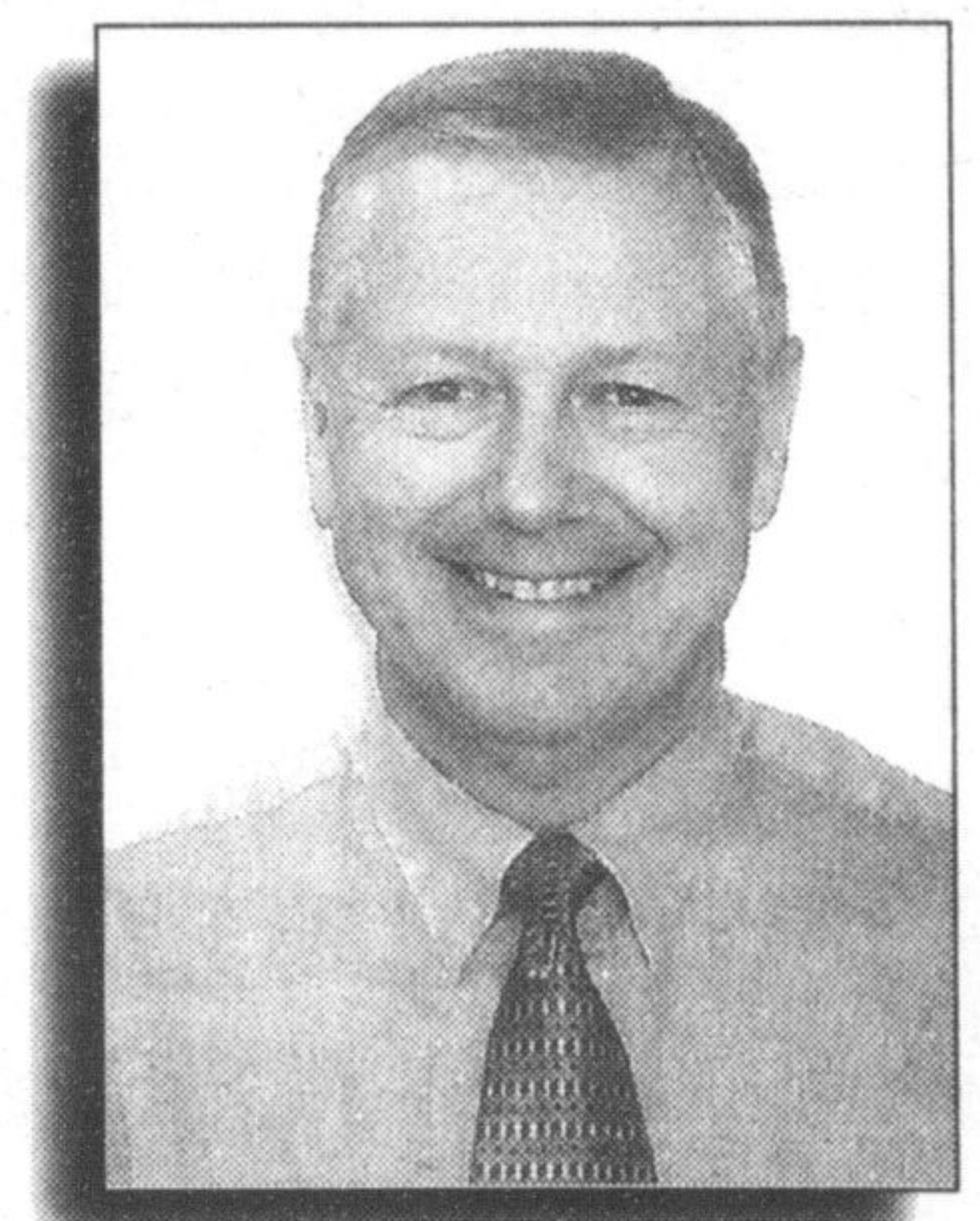


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