

Community Page

Meter finally off for long-time cabby

After four decades, Crowe calls it a career

By **JASON MISNER**
The Champion

It's early on September 3, 1963 and the sun is shining bright as Milton awakens from its slumber. A dapper John Crowe, a 28-year-old young gun, dressed in a collared shirt and dark red tie, proudly slides behind the wheel of his new white Pontiac.

It's the first day of a part-time job as the town's newly-minted cab driver. Mr. Crowe's regular job is working at Main Street's Kerr Rexall Pharmacy as a clerk, a jack of all trades really. Mopping. Dusting. Cashier. Whatever needs to be done.

Store owner Ken Elsley has given Mr. Crowe permission to use the business as his sort-of dispatch centre, giving out the store number as the point of contact for would-be customers.

This pleasant morning, his heart is beating taxi driver. Before he arrives at Kerr's, he gets his first customer — Mrs. Windmüller.

She's flailing her arms, wanting him to pull over near Main and Martin streets. His sign, Crowe Taxi Service, has made its first impression on one of the few thousand that live in town.

Mrs. Windmüller has a baby-sitting job she must get to and needs a ride. Mr. Crowe easily obliges. She pays the drop fare of a whopping 40 cents and will be required to pay 30 cents for every kilometre thereafter. Her ride this day is 70 cents. Mr. Crowe's first dollar — almost.

"It was exciting," Mr. Crowe recalled in a recent interview, dressed cleanly in black, wearing, of course, a dark tie in the courtyard of his Millside Drive apartment.

And Mrs. Windmüller became one of countless dedicated customers Mr. Crowe had the pleasure of driving over a 40-year career, whether it be to a hairdresser or to Pearson airport. And that's amid recovering from a massive heart attack at age 42 and a quadruple bypass heart surgery at 62.

At the age of 69 — he'll turn 70 by month's end — Mr. Crowe has given up his taxi licence for the easy life. Retirement. Already he's restless.

Honoured by council

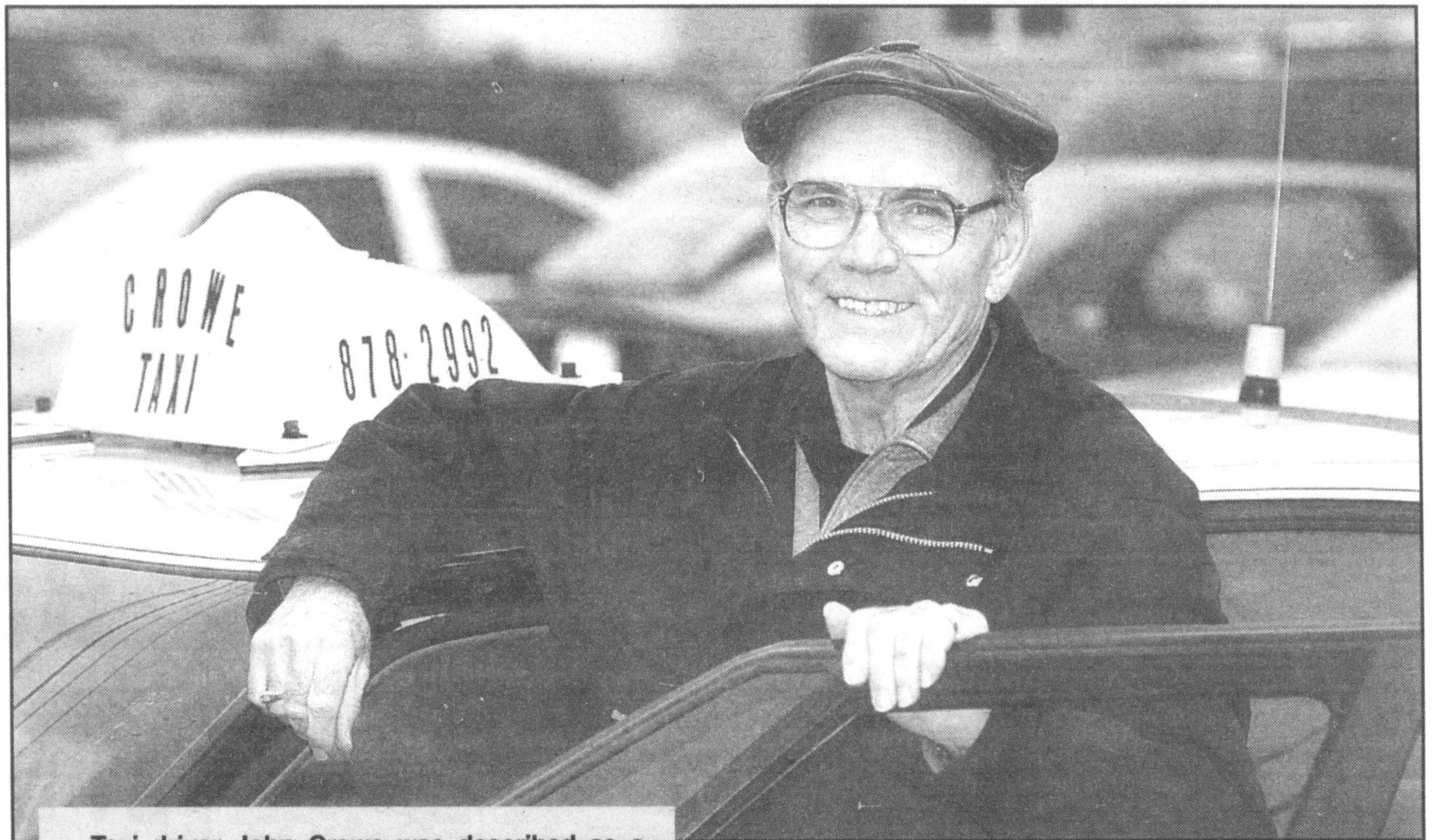
Mr. Crowe was informally recognized by town council at its March 29 council meeting. He was in attendance as the Town passed a bylaw that officially allowed him to transfer his taxi license of his 1998 Buick LeSabre to the cab-chain, Milton Taxi.

Mayor Gord Krantz called him an "institution".

It would appear he deserves a fancier recognition party, one with all the bells and whistles. But Mr. Crowe's personality probably won't allow for it. He's a straight-shooter. Just doing my job, he'd say. What a job he did.

Born in 1939 in Milton on Sarah Street, Mr. Crowe was raised to be a hard worker. His dad was a mechanic at a Ford dealership, where Carriage Square now sits, and he got his son interested in cars. The Martin Street school student was working to be a mechanic apprentice.

At 17, he decide to change direction and work at the drugstore.



Taxi driver John Crowe was described as a Milton institution when officially recognized for his long-standing service at a recent town council meeting.

Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

There was talk he might become a pharmacist, but it would take six or seven years and a lot of money to get his licence, he said.

Then at 28, the taxi bug bit him. He said he always found himself calling cabs for customers. Why couldn't he drive them instead? "There were only two taxis in town, so I thought there was an opportunity," he said. "There was a little dissension, but we ended up getting along."

Already having a driver's licence, he paid Town Hall the \$5 for the taxi license, and off he went to be a fledgling cab driver.

"I put an ad in The Champion, saying, 'Call the one who gives 24-hour service.'"

And that's what he did for the first 14 years of driving a cab. He was available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. He occasionally got a 3 a.m. phone call from boozers ready to call it a night.

"Once you got to know the drunks, they ain't bad," he said, shrugging his shoulders, stressing he was never robbed or assaulted during his taxiing tenure. "I used to be 200 pounds."

Oh, and he never delivered a baby, but he frantically drove expectant mothers to Milton District Hospital so professionals could.

The long hours helped him provide for a family of three with his wife Marilyn. Once her husband quit the drugstore job and became a cab driver full-time, she and the kids took taxi calls at home.

"I didn't like him being out all the night, but it's what you had to do," Ms Crowe said, adding she supported her husband's career change from the very beginning. "Once the kids got older, they did

it (took cab calls) too."

They eventually bought a two-way radio, which made the business run much smoother.

When the heart attack struck Mr. Crowe at 42, he scaled back his work hours to 14 to 18 hour days. Not scaled back enough for his wife, mind you. "He should have taken back more, but he didn't want to," Ms Crowe said, looking sternly at her husband.

When the '70s rolled around, more taxis started to infiltrate Milton, and business slowed a bit. But the family, Mr. Crowe said, never missed paying their bills.

Hunkering down, the family made it through the lean years and by the 1980s and mid-1990s, the taxi business was back in full swing. Then, two days before Christmas in 1996, the family was hit by life-threatening news — Mr. Crowe needed quadruple bypass heart surgery.

"I was told he had a 5 per cent chance to survive," Ms Crowe said, a shocked look overcoming her face. "I prayed a lot."

Defying the odds — like he did in succeeding as a lone cab driver — Mr. Crowe recovered. And true to form, by April the next year, he was back driving a cab, albeit working eight hours a day, five days a week. A regular work day.

Interestingly, Mr. Crowe's taxi business wasn't really impacted by the residential growth that started to besiege the town about four years ago. He always had a steady list of customers from years back, probably for his customer service traits.

Meanwhile, this past weekend, he had plans to attend the Henry Ford museum in Dearborn, Michigan. It contains all kinds of historic automobiles. He was excited about it.

Sounds as if Mr. Crowe's 1963 Pontiac should be included.

Jason Misner can be reached at jmisner@miltoncanadian-champion.com.

TV COGECO
Truly Local Television

www.cogeco.ca

NORTH HALTON STUDIO

Laurier Plaza

500 Laurier Avenue

Milton, ON L9T 4R3

905-878-9306

Cogeco Cable
Channel 14

Programming Schedule — Tuesday, April 20- Monday, April 26, 2004

Tuesday, April 20		Wednesday, April 21		Thursday, April 22		Friday, April 23		Saturday, April 24		Sunday, April 25		Monday, April 26	
5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Early Week Edition	5pm, 6pm	Plugged In! Early Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Early Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Late Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Late Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Late Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Late Week Edition
5:30pm	Seniors Showcase	5:30pm	PeopleSpeak in Halton	5:30pm	Oster Health Connection			5:30pm	Be Inspired	5:30pm	Be Inspired	5:30pm	State of the Region Address
6:30pm	Optimist TV Bingo (Live)	6:30pm	Be Inspired	6:30pm	Money Week			6:30pm	Seniors Showcase	6:30pm	Seniors Showcase	6:30pm	Faces - Milton Community Awards
8:00pm	Halton Hills Council - April 9	7:00pm	Swap Talk (Live)	7:00pm	The Issue Is...			7:00pm	PeopleSpeak in Halton	7:00pm	PeopleSpeak in Halton	7:00pm	Be Inspired
		8:00pm	Halton Region Council - Apr 21	8:00pm	Main Street			8:00pm	Money Week	8:00pm	Faces & DeMarsh	8:00pm	SportsZone Live (Live)
								8:30pm	Faces & DeMarsh				

Faces: Featuring interviews from the Milton Community Awards — Monday, 6:30pm