

Government Access Centre well-used facility at Region

By **MELANIE HENNESSEY**
The Champion

In marking Customer Service Week October 11 to 15, the Region is striving to raise local awareness of its Government Access Centre — a one-stop shop for everything from social insurance card applications to social housing information. The centre, which celebrated its grand opening about two years ago, can provide residents with information from all three levels of government.

And, according to Access Halton Manager Ron MacMaster, it's a service that's well used.

"About 3,000 people per month come in (to the centre)," he said.

"We give them as much information as we possibly can. If we don't have it right at hand, we investigate where they should be calling."

The centre is a result of a partnership between Halton and the provincial government. Mr. MacMaster said the Region was the first municipality to partner with the Province on the access centre initiative.

It's staffed by 10 full time and two part-time employees, who Mr. MacMaster said receive training from the Province.

Local information that's provided through the centre includes things like waste collection calen-

dars and housing assistance.

An interesting feature the Province has added to the centre is 'life event bundles'.

"They are groupings of information on a particular subject matter," Mr. MacMaster said, such as the lost wallet package, which provides people with the applications and information they would need to get their personal documents back together.

He added that the Region has 'Haltonized' the bundles by including things like information on services the Region provides for pregnant women or new parents.

Since the centre opened, Mr. MacMaster said the response from the public has been positive.

"They're (customers) quite surprised about the information they can get here," he said.

Examples of federal documents provided includes social insurance card applications or more information on passports.

And, if what you're looking for isn't on hand at the centre, Mr. MacMaster said staff can access the provincial government Web site for more forms or will point people in the right direction of who they should be contacting.

For those who prefer a self-serve environment, the access centre has a computer available for the public to surf the federal, provincial and

regional government Web sites.

Besides the access centre, Mr. MacMaster pointed out that another important initiative the Region has undertaken for the public is a customer service strategy.

"It sets some standards on how to respond to customers," he said.

One part of this strategy, he said, is to provide a guaranteed live answer everytime someone calls the Region, meaning if a person is put through to a voice mail, they can press 0 to speak to someone else.

If someone sends an e-mail or leaves a voice mail for a Regional staff member, Mr. MacMaster said they have to respond to it by the end of the next business day.

"Halton Region staff are very committed to customer service," he said. "The important part is the customers have a consistent experience."

In terms of better serving the public, Mr. MacMaster noted a big change Halton has made within the past few years is create one phone number to access all the Region's services.

To use the Government Access Centre, visit 1151 Bronte Rd. or call (905) 825-6000 and press 0.

Melanie Hennessey can be reached at mhennessey@milton-canadianchampion.com.

Johnny Bower coming to dinner

Hockey legend Johnny Bower will roll into town Friday as a special guest at the United Way of Milton's annual dinner and auction.

Mr. Bower played for the Toronto Maple Leafs and New York Rangers during his NHL career. He helped the Leafs win four Stanley Cup championships and earned a spot in the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1976.

He will help the United Way raise funds toward its 2004 goal of \$450,000.

About 100 items donated by local businesses will be

auctioned off, including the use of a condo in Hawaii for a week, dinner with Milton council, art prints and gift baskets.

"This year's dinner and auction promises to be a lot of fun, with something of interest for all," said United Way of Milton Executive Director Anne Eadie.

Tickets for the event, to be held at Granite Ridge Golf Club, cost \$60 per person and are still available. Call (905) 875-2550 to reserve a spot.

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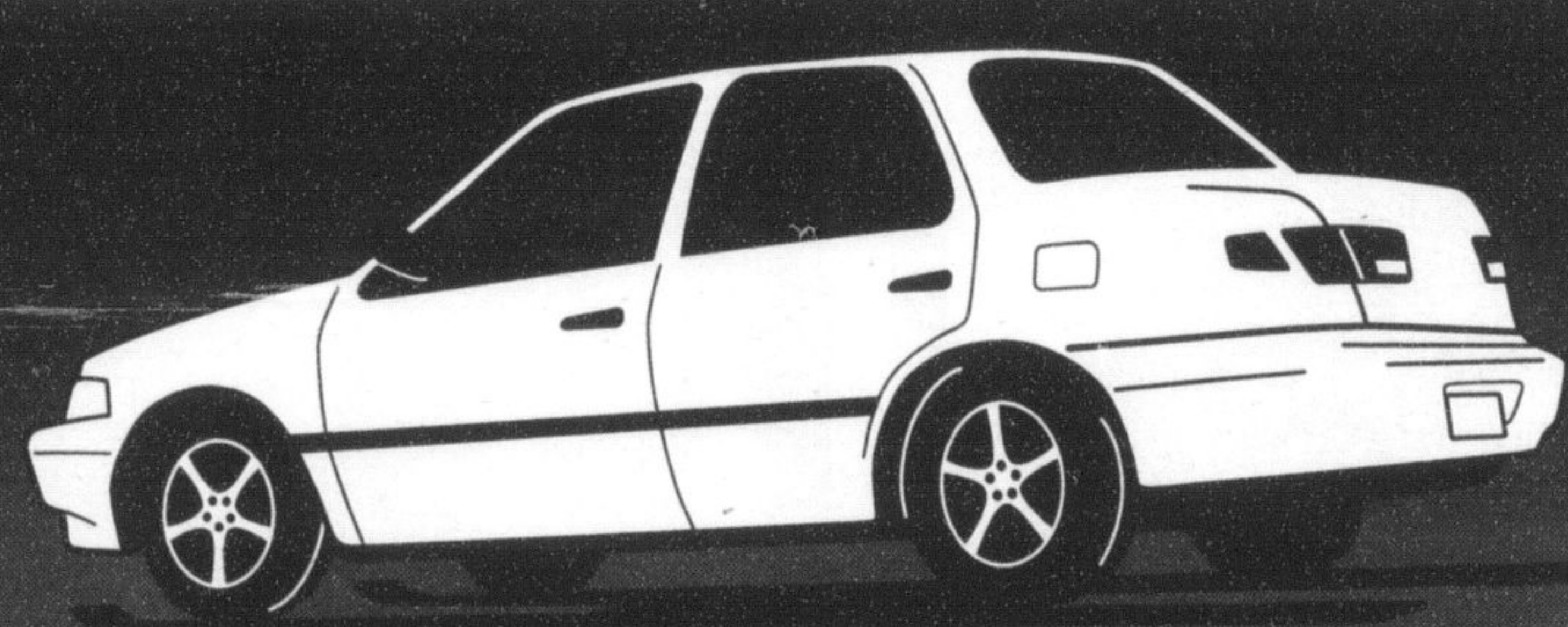


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The Canadian Champion



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