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MS. DIANE SELBY & DR. GARNET MALEY
are pleased to announce that their daughter

LAURA SELBY-MALEY
received the Duke of Edinburgh's Silver Medal at a recent ceremony at Queen's Park from the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, James K. Bartleman.

Laura Selby-Maley achieved the award by attaining personally-established goals in the areas of community service, skills development, physical fitness and expeditions.

Congratulations!

HaltonSearch.com

2,000 people expected to attend this year's Christmas pageant

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**
The Champion

Milton residents will have a chance to escape plastic Santas and busy malls this weekend and experience the first Christmas in Bethlehem before their very eyes.

On the Way to Bethlehem is an outdoor Christmas nativity pageant that will take place from 6:30 to 9 p.m. Friday to Monday at Country Heritage Park, 8560 Tremaine Rd.

The event is free, but donations will be accepted.

"This year we're anticipating 2,000 people per night," said pageant director Andrea Rowbottom. "The response is getting really big."

More than 500 volunteers — including a cast of more than 150 and two school choirs — are contributing to this year's pageant, which is a project of the Milton Area Christian Churches Working Together.

On arrival at the park, visitors will enter a large barn and can enjoy refreshments and Christmas music by a mass choir before leaving in small groups to travel the road to Bethlehem.

Each group will be assigned a guide — someone who knows the road well and will lead the group along a 20 to 30-minute journey making 15 stops along the way at scenes that enact the Christmas story.

Visitors will even be able to interact with some of the characters, including Roman soldiers, shepherds, magi, innkeepers and fellow travellers.

"We wanted to create a pageant where people felt they were part of the performance," said Ms Rowbottom.



"So we have tried to incorporate as much interaction between the actors and the visitors as possible."

At the end of the journey, visitors will take a wagon ride back.

One of the highlights is the more than two dozen live animals — including a camel — that add a sense of authenticity to the event.

Event in its third year

This is the third year of the pageant. Over the past two years, more than 9,000 visitors have experienced the event, from places as far away as Peterborough and Sarnia. In fact, a survey found that more than 40 per cent of last year's visitors came from outside Halton.

Ms Rowbottom said the event is one that delights young and old.

"Last year I got letters from three people over (the age of) 80 who said it was worth every bone-chilling second waiting in line," she said.

In the past couple of years, the popularity of the event led to some long line-ups at the start of the tour, Ms Rowbottom said.

But this year the order has been changed, so visitors start at the large barn, instead of ending up there.

That way, they can wait in a warm and cozy atmosphere until it's time to depart for the tour.

Costumes colourful

There are at least 175 colourful and unique costumes that will be worn in the pageant — not an easy feat to organize.

"Other than the angels, no two costumes are the same," Ms Rowbottom said, adding, "Careful thought is put into their design."

On the Way to Bethlehem appeals to people of various religious beliefs. Everyone — Christian or not — can take something away from it, Ms Rowbottom said.

"Anybody of any faith can see it and get something out of it. Whether they think it happened or it's just a story, everyone can take it at their own level."

Deaf interpreters will be available upon request.

Visitors are invited to enjoy a home-cooked dinner before the event at one of four participating churches in Milton.

The cost is \$10 per person, and \$5 for children.

Reservations can be made by calling (905) 864-7127 or e-mailing nativity2004@canada.com.

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

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