

# Region makes plea to Province to change GTA pooling system

By MELANIE HENNESSEY

The Champion

The Region is once again taking its concerns on GTA pooling — a system that helps Toronto pay for social services — to the Province.

Last week, regional council endorsed Chair Joyce Savoline writing to the ministers of finance, community and social services and municipal affairs and housing detailing issues Halton has with the current pooling system that's costing the Region more than \$30 million this year, or \$164 per household.

"Hopefully, this impresses on them (the ministers) they can work with us," Ms Savoline said. "We want to work with them."

This comes on the heels of the Region being notified that it owes an additional \$3.4 million for 2002 and 2003 pooling due to discrepancies between figures from the Ministry of Finance and the bills put out by the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Regional Treasurer Jane MacCaskill explained this amount will be deducted from the Province's upcoming monthly payments to the Region for its own social assistance program.

But she said they haven't started the deductions yet because the Region has asked for more documentation regarding the pooling figures and requested a meeting with the Province, GTA regions and City of Toronto.

The Region also made accrual provisions, or put money aside at the end of 2002 and 2003 based on the anticipated actual amount of pooling costs, so there'll be no impact on this year's budget.

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JOYCE SAVOLINE

"We always accrue to what we think the maximum amount owing is," Ms MacCaskill said.

GTA pooling has long been a concern of regional council and staff. The pooling system was created by the Province to assist Toronto in paying for downloaded social services when the city amalgamated in 1998.

Some of the issues the Region has with the system include its lack of accountability and predictability and lack of independent audit verification.

"It's been a very frustrating process for our council as it's (pooling money) levied through our regional taxes," said Ms MacCaskill. "They (council) have very little control."

Ms Savoline noted the Region has no option but to pay the pooling costs and continue to request that the Province work with Halton as legitimate, equal partners on the issue.

Last month, Richmond Hill council approved a resolution to withhold its share of the pooling costs, estimated to be about \$15 million in York Region's levy. The motion went on to say, "should the City of Toronto wish to use Richmond Hill tax-

payer money, council and staff would be happy to negotiate directly with the City of Toronto."

While Ms MacCaskill said regional council is just as frustrated as York Region, she noted it would be difficult for Halton to say it's not going to pay for pooling because the Province would just deduct the amount from its social assistance subsidy.

"There's the bigger issue of whether pooling is an appropriate funding mechanism," she said. "We think social services should be funded from income taxes and that's a provincial responsibility."

Ms MacCaskill added she thinks the Town of Richmond Hill's motion is basically just a statement of intent.

When asked if the Region would ever follow Richmond Hill's suit, Ms Savoline pointed out it's by law Halton has to put money into the pooling system.

"I would never suggest somebody break the law," she said, adding her style is to do the productive, effective thing and continue to make statements to the government on the pooling issue.

The GTA treasurers and CAOs have held a series of meetings with provincial staff over the past year or so with the hopes of resolving concerns and looking at options to eliminate pooling.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs has also indicated it will be setting up a sub-committee to further discuss finalizing pooling bills from previous years and options for an exit strategy. The Region has plans to request representation on the committee.

Melanie Hennessey can be reached at [mhennessey@miltoncanadianchampion.com](mailto:mhennessey@miltoncanadianchampion.com)

## Mall holds cereal drive

Milton Mall is helping the local Salvation Army restock its shelves by holding the March 'Break-Fast' Cold Cereal Collection over the next couple weeks.

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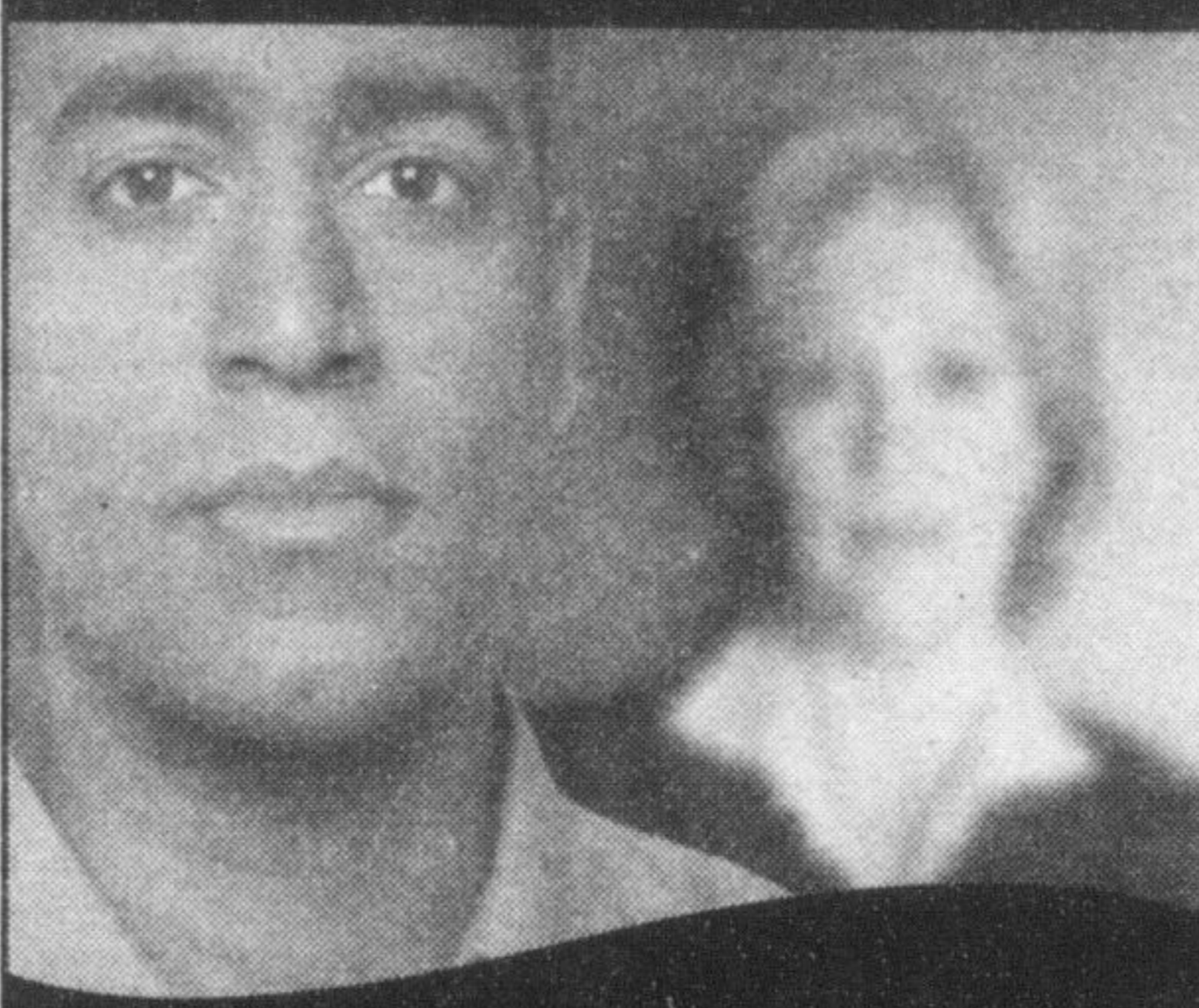
The Town is already gearing up for its 150th anniversary celebration in 2007.

At last week's council meeting, Ward 3 Councillor Cindy Lunau and Wards 2 and 4 Councillor Ron Furik were appointed to a celebration master committee, which will be responsible for generating ideas for events and activities to mark the anniversary.

Council also approved the mandate and terms of reference regarding the master committee and sub-committees.

The Town is now looking for two residents to sit on the master committee. Application forms are available at [www.milton.ca](http://www.milton.ca) or at the clerk's department in the Town Hall, 43 Brown St.

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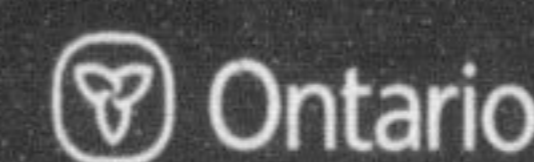


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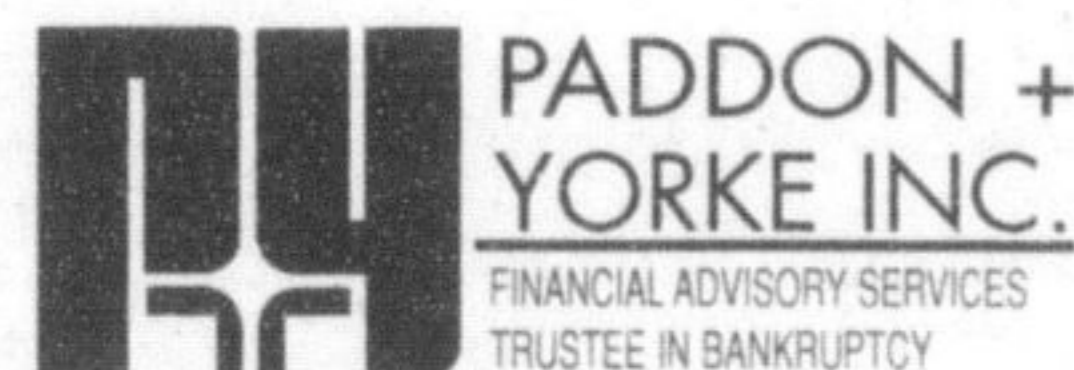
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