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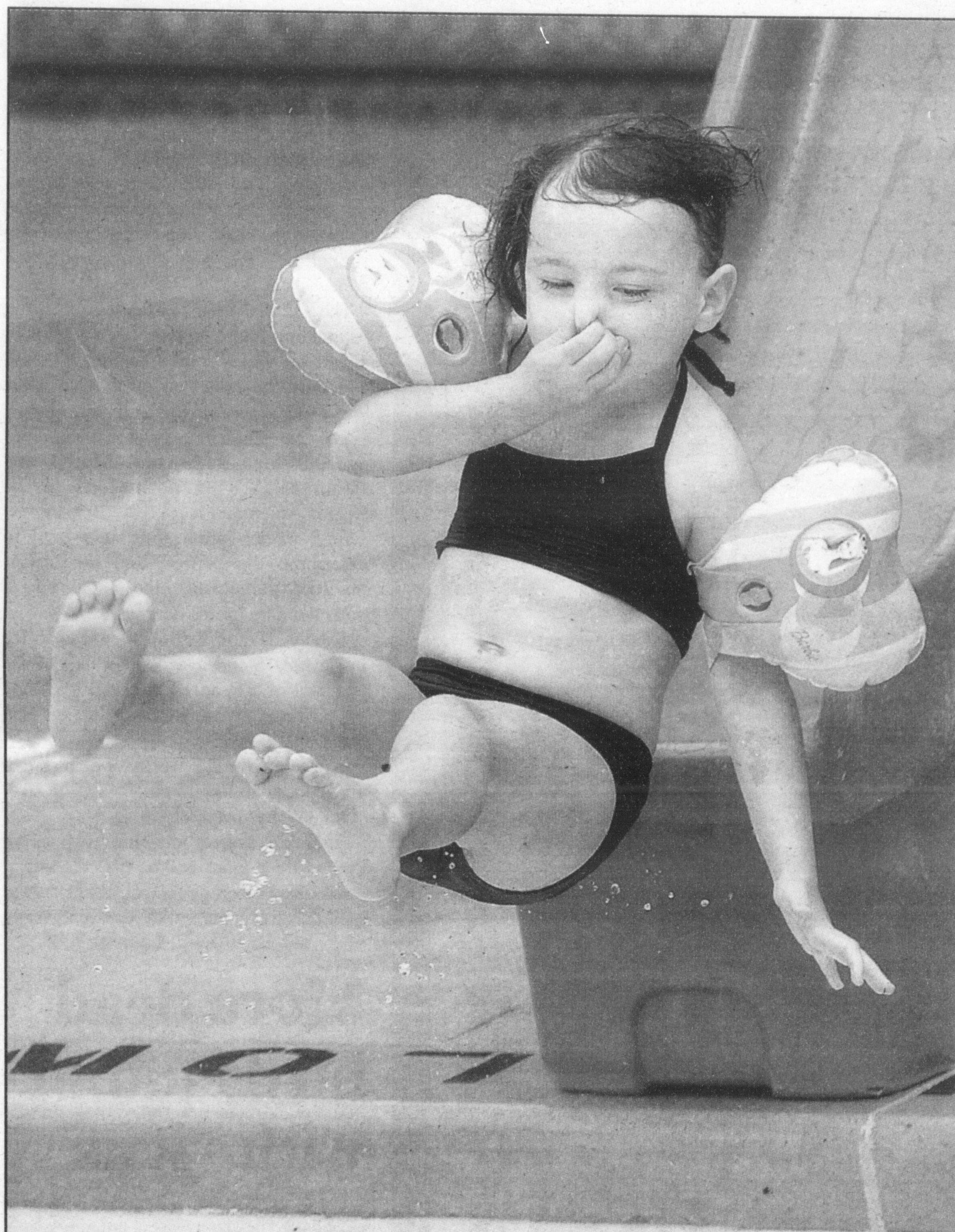
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36 PAGES "Using Communication to Build Better Communities"



What a relief

Four-year-old Sonny Corbett plunges into the Rotary Park swimming pool Tuesday afternoon in an effort to beat the heat and have fun, of course.

Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Lots of heat alerts issued this summer

By MELANIE HENNESSEY
The Champion

The extremely hot and humid weather local residents have been suffering through lately has caused a sharp spike in the number of heat alerts the Region's health department has issued this summer.

So far this season, seven heat alerts have been issued in Halton that have spanned over 27 days while in 2004 there was only one alert that lasted one day, said health department environmental health specialist Burgess Hawkins. The longest alert was in effect from June 8 to June 14.

The increase this year can be attributed to different weather patterns, said Mr. Hawkins, meaning there've been more extremely hot days.

"I know we've had a lot of hot southerly winds come up," he noted.

When Environment Canada issues a humidex advisory the health department then reissues a heat alert, meaning it either feels like it's 40 C or hotter or there's going to be at least three consecutive days with temperatures over 36 C.

At press time yesterday, the alert was still in effect.

Smog alerts double

With the extreme heat often comes smog, and Mr. Hawkins said there've been 12 smog alerts so far this year that've stretched over 39 days, while last year there were only six alerts that lasted a total of 14 days.

The Ministry of the Environment puts a smog alert into effect — and the Region then reissues the information — when the air quality is rated as poor on the air quality index.

Mr. Hawkins said the increase this year is largely weather related, explaining that the heat causes pollutants to react in the air and produce ground-level ozone, a component of smog.

He noted about 50 per cent of the air pol-

lutants in Ontario come up from the United States and the other half come from local causes like cars.

While an alert may sound alarming to some people, Mr. Hawkins said they're issued to basically remind residents to take care during the extreme temperatures and also so shelters can be prepared.

The heat can be especially hazardous for seniors, infants, young children and those with chronic heart or lung disease and asthma.

Some precautions local residents can take include:

- Staying in the shade and limiting outdoor activities to the morning and evening.
- Keeping the shades drawn and blinds closed.
- Wearing a hat and sunscreen.
- Drinking lots of water and natural fruit juices.
- Exercising indoors in an air-conditioned area.
- Wearing loose-fitting clothes that allow sweat to evaporate.

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