

# Program helps integrate immigrants in workforce

Group looks to get all Halton municipalities on board

By MELANIE HENNESSEY  
The Champion

The Halton Mentorship Program for Internationally Trained Professionals is looking to get all of the region's municipalities on board with its bid to help skilled immigrants integrate into the local workforce.

The pilot project was launched earlier this year by Sheridan College through funding from the provincial government program Job Connect, with the Region and Town of Oakville serving as partners.

Program co-ordinator Alice Li told the Region's administration and finance committee Wednesday that they now want to expand the mentoring initiative into Milton, Halton Hills and Burlington.

Ms Li spoke about the benefits of the program, such as how it enables public and private organizations to tap into the diverse and skilled immigrant population.

"It really uses the skills that new

immigrants offer," she said. "I would have to say the peer-to-peer mentoring program is a proven approach."

She said plans are in the works to meet with local mayors soon about the program.

So far the Region has provided five mentors and Oakville three. These individuals meet with foreign-trained professionals to help them in a variety of ways, such as by giving them an understanding of the Canadian workplace and information on potential local employers.

Besides expanding throughout the region, Ms Li said other goals of the program include getting area employers to become mentoring organizations, partnering with similar programs in Toronto, York and Peel regions and collaborating with local agencies.

Regional and Oakville Councillor Mike Lansdown said he thinks the federal government needs to become involved as a

funding partner, since it's the "order of government that invites them (immigrants) into Canada."

Regional Chairman Joyce Savoline went on to emphasize the importance of educating people on internationally-trained professionals and how their work experience can be valuable locally, using a story on the plight of her own family as an example.

After coming to Canada, she said her mother's ability to be employed here and type on an English typewriter was questioned because her previous work experience was in China.

"It's a matter of educating people — they just don't know," she said. "We just need to try to create as much awareness as possible."

To help create that awareness, Ms Li asked the committee to recommend she make a presentation to regional council on the program, which was supported.

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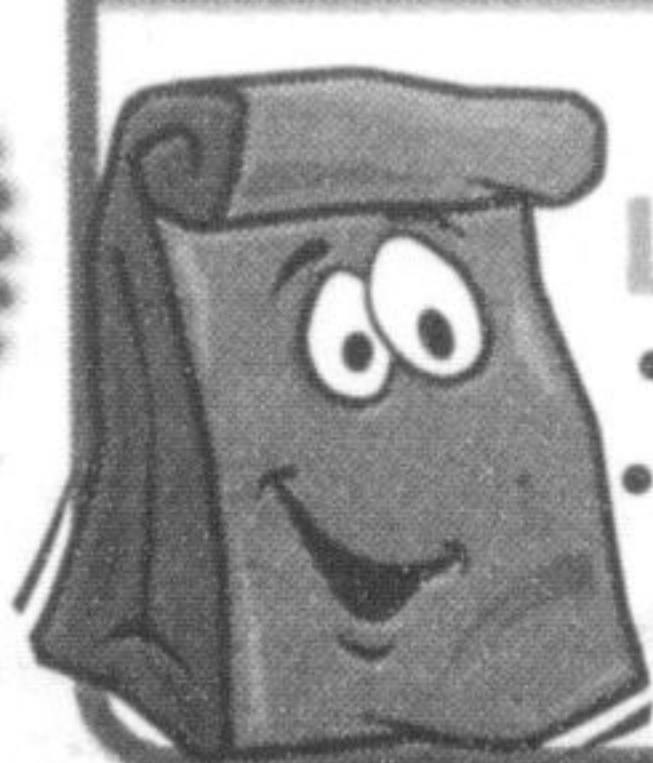
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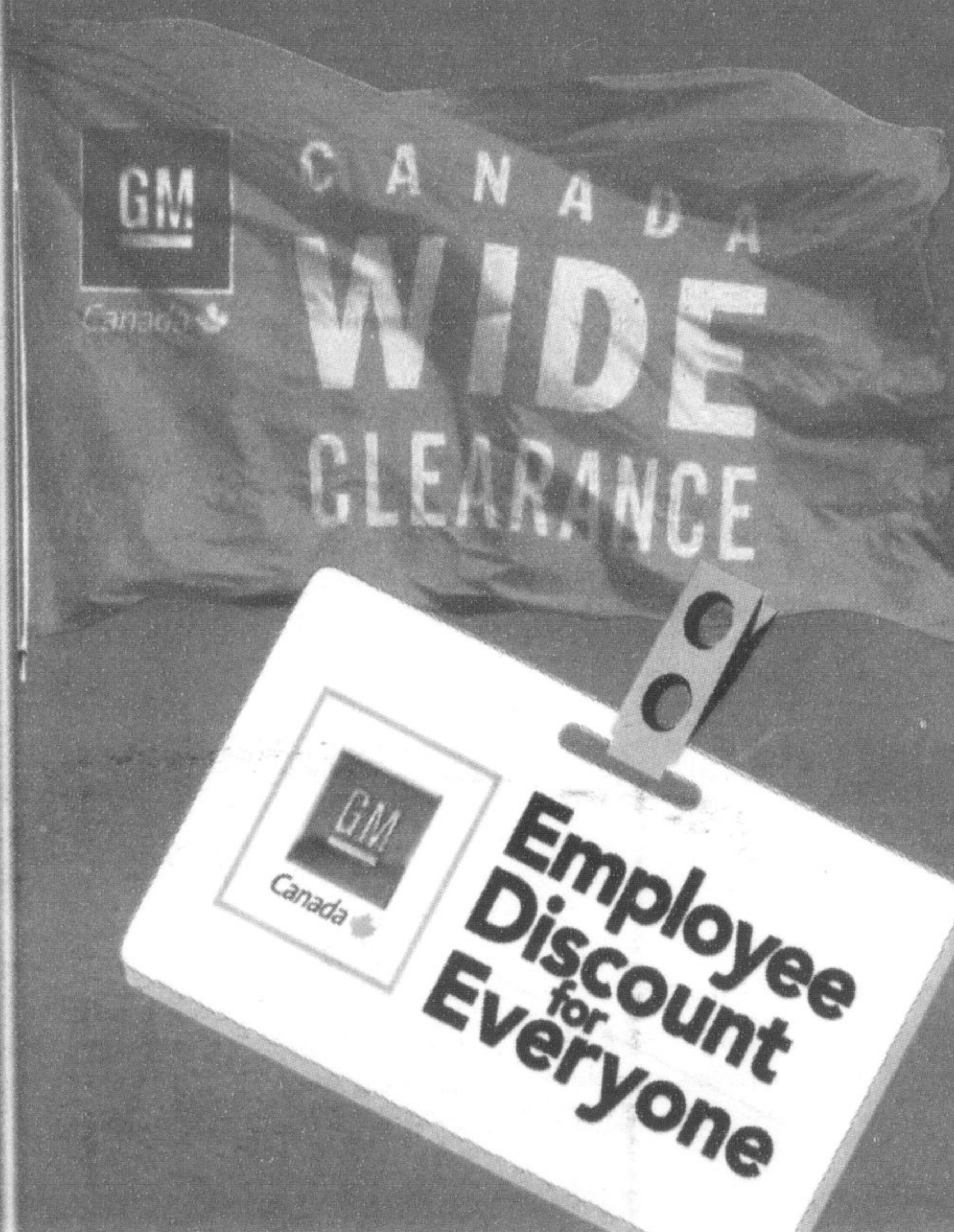
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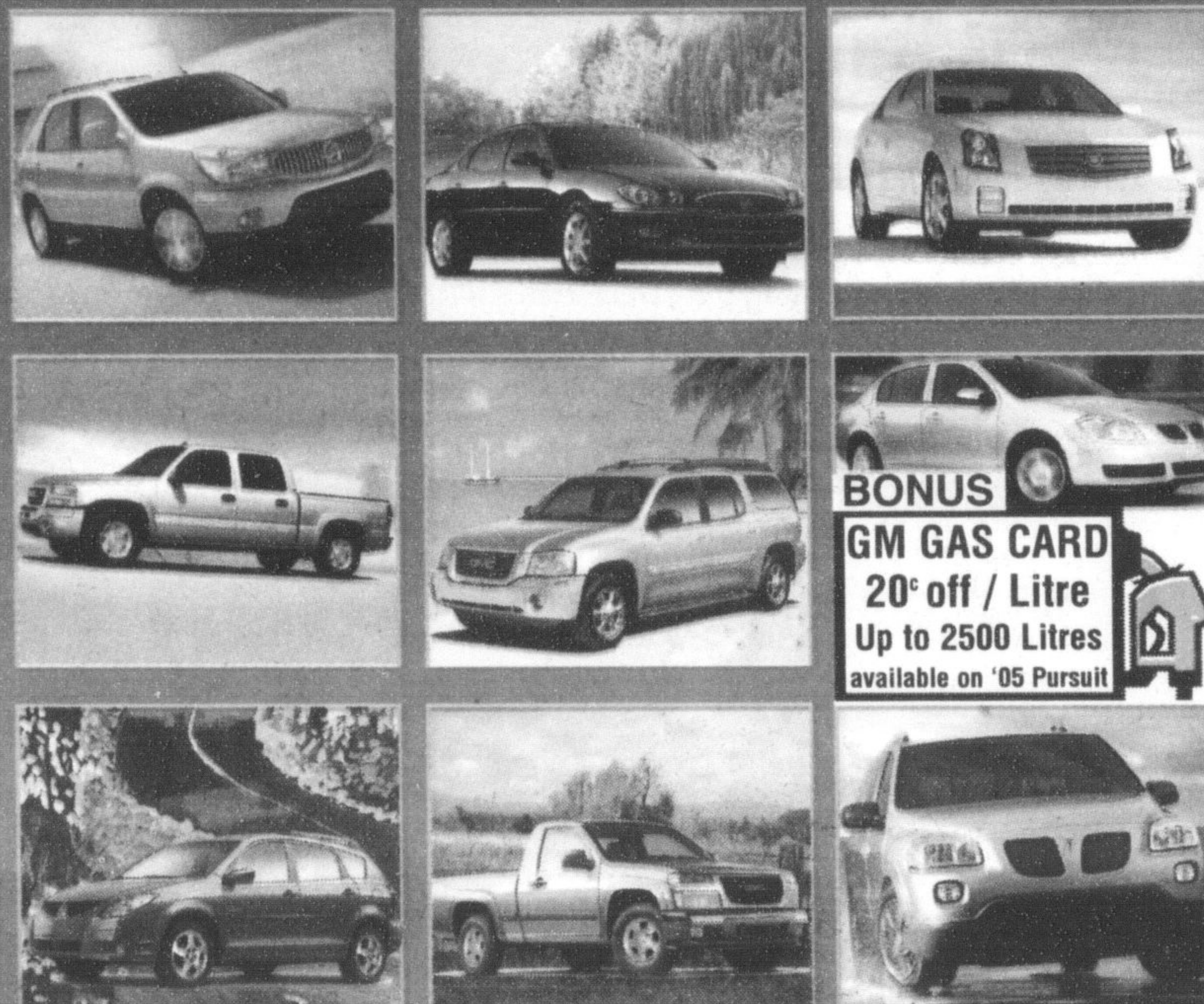
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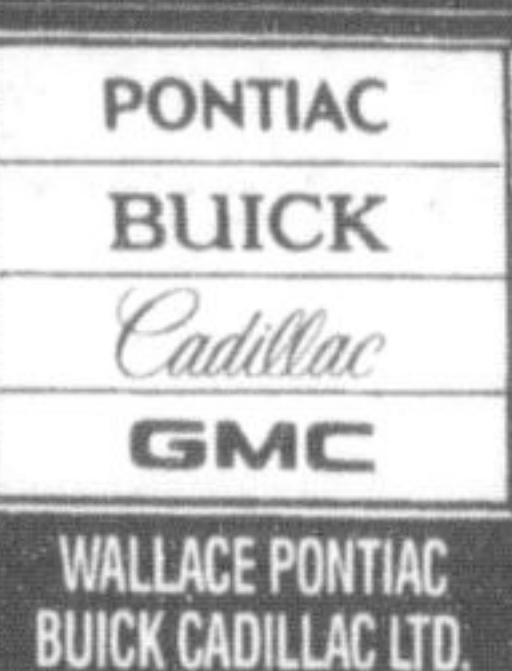
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