

Inmates thank jail volunteers at Maplehurst

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**
The Champion

He spoke honestly and from the heart about the humiliating experience being sent to Maplehurst Correctional Complex was.

"It created a lot of turmoil in me," said Allan — who didn't want his last name used — Thursday night from the podium at Halton Hills Place on Steeles Avenue.

But, he said, thanks to scores of volunteers with big hearts, he wasn't alone as he began rebuilding himself from the inside out.

"On behalf of many, thanks for treating us with dignity and respect," he said to the volunteers in attendance.

Allan was one of four inmates who were on hand to personally delivered their thanks at Maplehurst's annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner.

It was a night to recognize the many messengers of hope, as they were repeatedly called, who've helped transform the lives of many inmates.

Five people were presented Community Service Awards, including Brampton's Ted Brown, who began volunteering about five years ago at Maplehurst. Since then, he's led a team that conducts Bible studies for inmates and produces a monthly newsletter for the men.

And at Christmas time, he and his wife take it upon themselves to ensure each inmate receives a gift.

He recalled the first time he entered the complex — the largest correctional facility in Canada — as "a pretty scary thing for me."

But, he said, the work quickly captured his heart.

"Everyone's made mistakes, although (those of) some of us are bigger than others. It's providing a sense of hope to people who live without hope — that's what drives us to do what we do," Mr. Brown said.

Another recipient was Phillip Miller, who leads chapel services with inmates along with other members of Milton Gospel Hall.

"It's a blessing to be involved with a volunteer group at Maplehurst," he said.

Monte Kwinter, Ontario's Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, said volunteers do what many others only think about.

"It's easy to talk about the importance of volunteering. What matters is the doing," Mr. Kwinter said.

More than 325 people currently volunteer their time at the Chisholm Drive correctional facility, he said. That amounts to 7,000 hours of volunteer service every year.

Maplehurst's programs run the gauntlet from rehabilitation programs like Alcoholics Anonymous to spiritual support such as chapel services and Bible studies, all of which depend on volunteers to keep them running.

Frances Pedder, co-ordinator of volunteer programs, said it's been a "challenging" year for volunteers at Maplehurst, a comment met by vocal agreement.

"There have been many lockdowns and lots of program cancellations. However, you're (volunteers) still here, you're still coming out," Ms Pedder said.

Doug Dalgleish, Maplehurst superintendent, said one of the main goals of staff and volunteers is to "instill social values" into the inmates and help them make a smoother transition into society when they're released.

It may sometimes be a thankless job, but it makes a difference, he said.

"It pays dividends later on for those people whose lives have been touched."

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



Official opening

The Canadian Mental Health Association officially opened its new Halton Region Branch head office at 388 Main St. E. Wednesday. At top, from left, Miki Ackermann, public education programs manager and Tamara Leniew, public education programs worker, showcase the Mental Health Works program. Above, cutting the ribbon are, from left, Oakville MPP Kevin Flynn, Peter Munns, a regional consultant for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Diane Doherty, Halton branch executive director, and Mayor Gord Krantz. The head office was previously located at Milton Mall.

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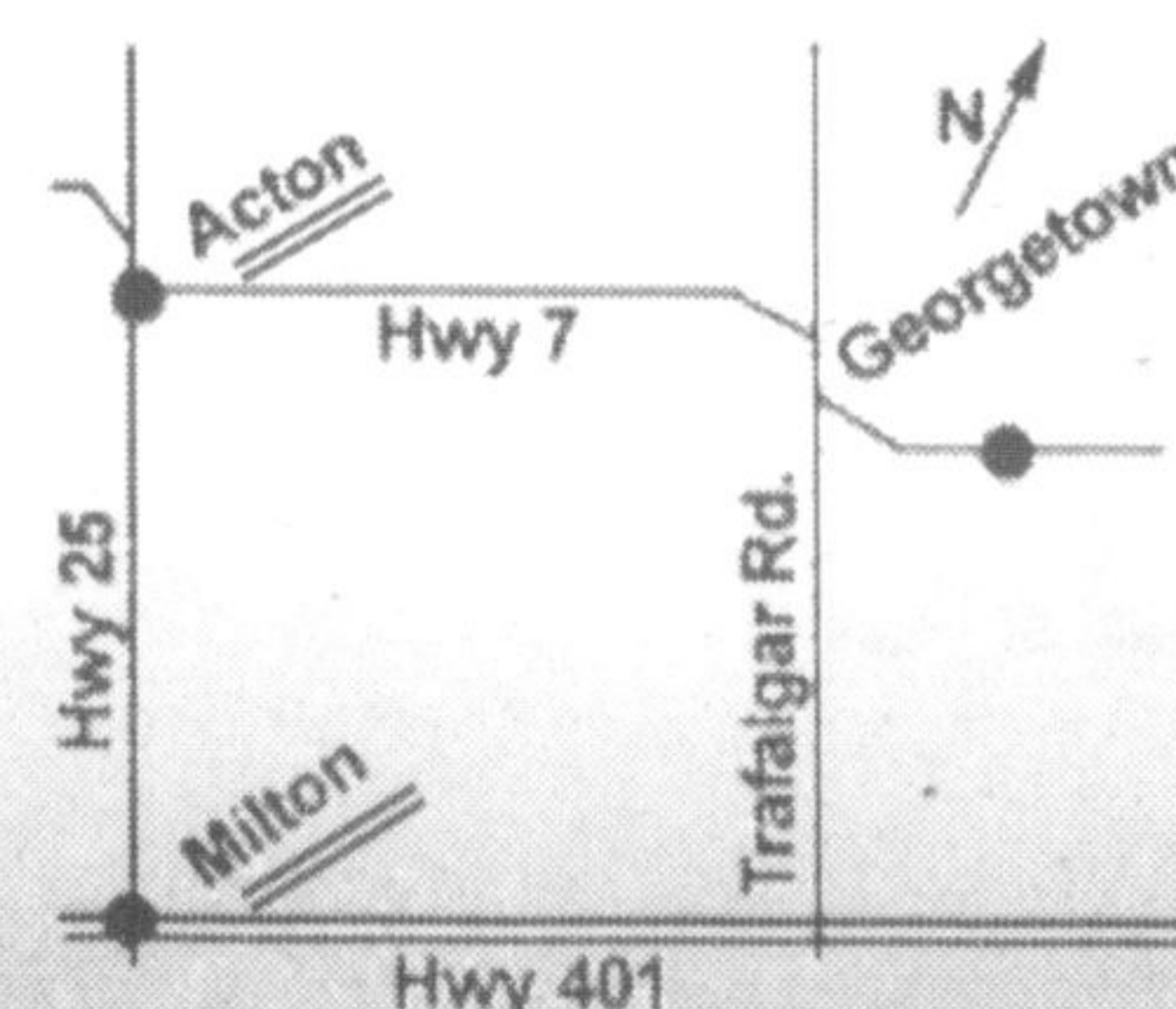
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