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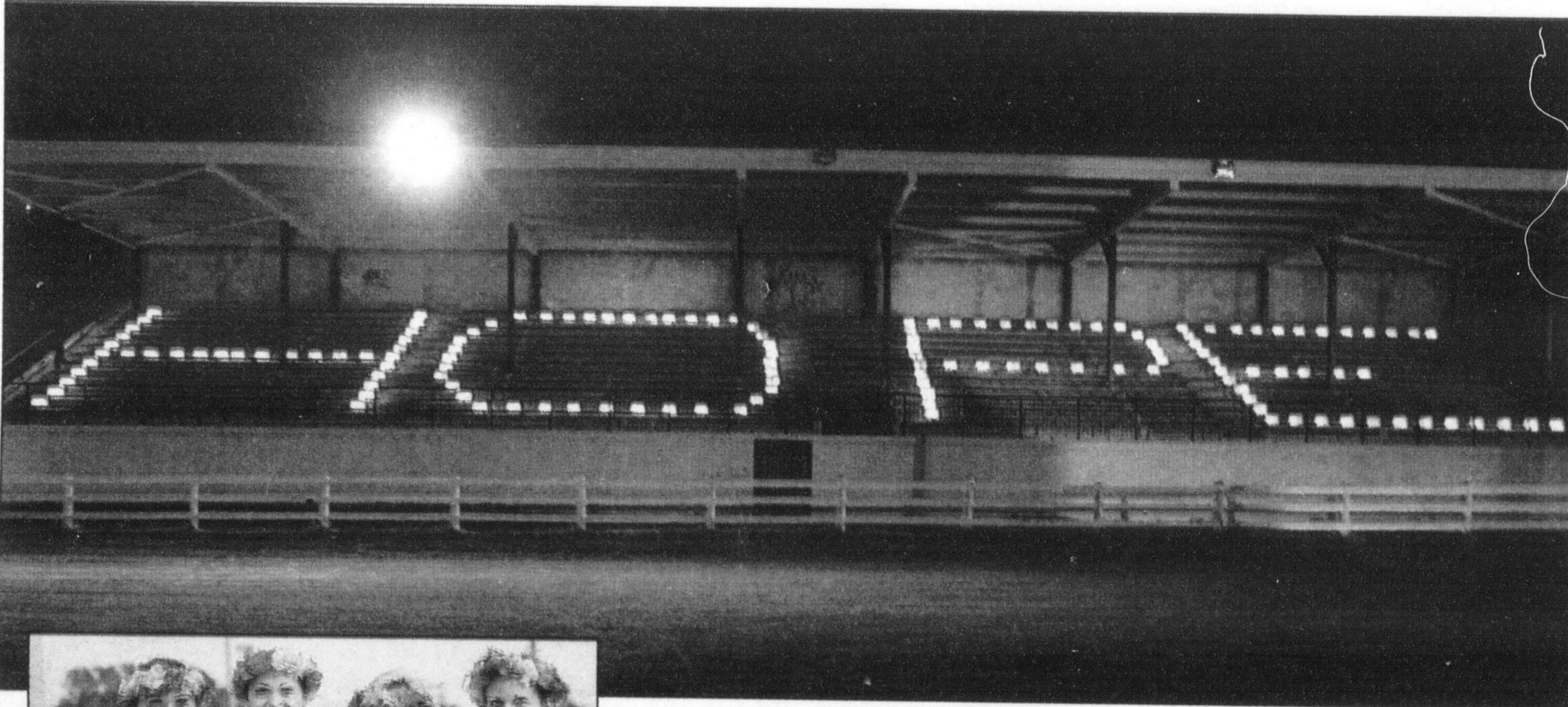
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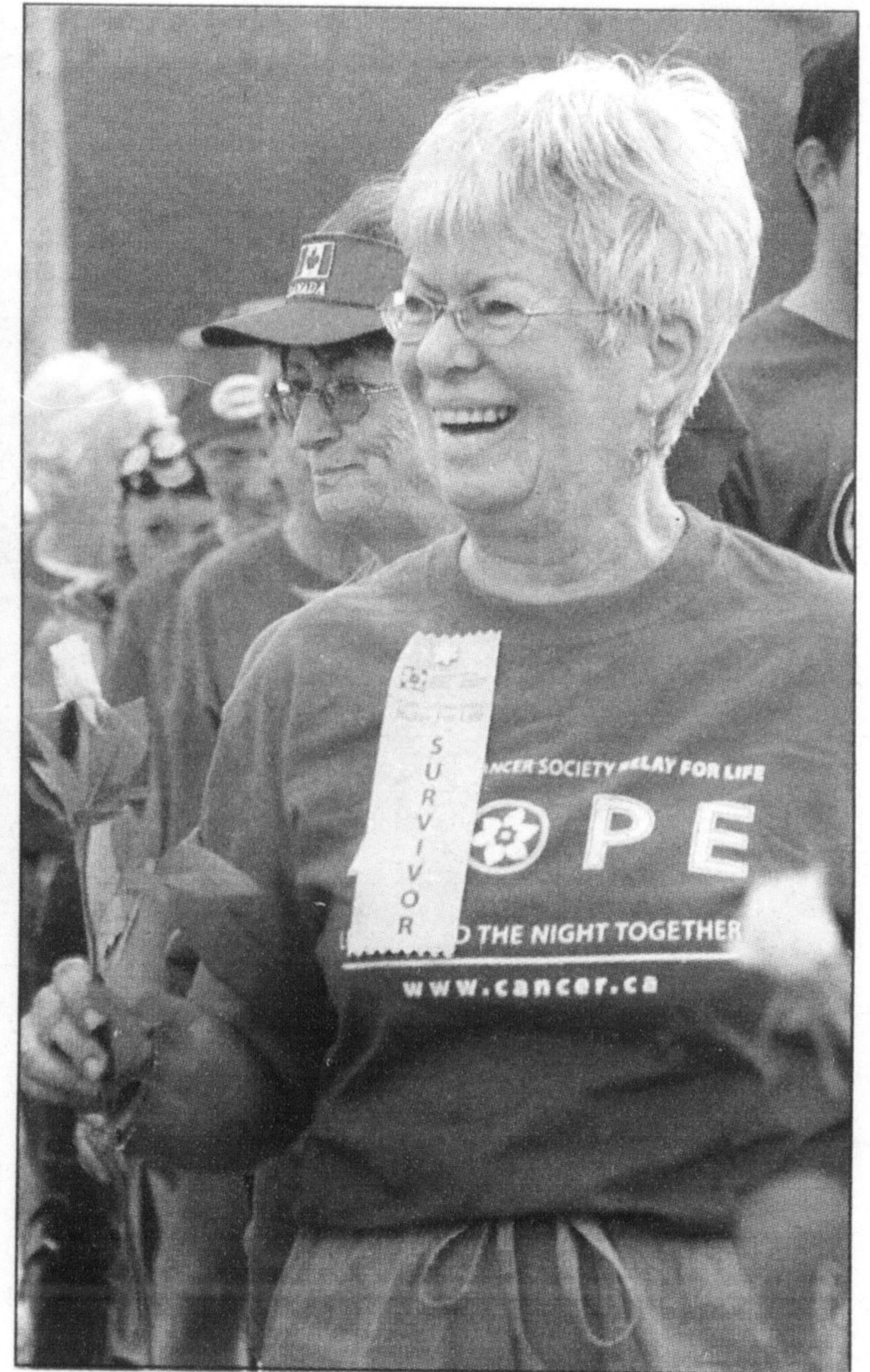
Tuesday, June 20, 2006

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RELAY OF HOPE: Above, The Milton Fair Grounds' grandstand lights up with a powerful message during Friday night's second annual Milton Relay for Life, which drew roughly 1,300 residents and has so far raised \$210,000 for the Canadian Cancer Society. At right, Diane Vandebosche flashes a huge smile while accepting her rose — as well as applause from friends and family — during the evening kick-off Survivor Lap. At left, Cambrian Cancer Crusaders members (front row) Jaime Doherty and Natacha Serafin, and (back row) Meaghan Henderson, Kristen McCracken, Brenda Jobling and Laura Snider enjoy the weekend event. For related photos of Relay for Life, see page A8.

VICTORIA ROBERTS / SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION



Vastis awaits sentence for tree cutting

Crown, defence miles apart on appropriate punishment

By **Stephanie Thiessen**
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Three years after he plowed down more than 20 acres of trees from an environmentally sensitive area, George Vastis' fate lies in the hands of a justice of the peace.

Thursday afternoon, summations in his sentencing hearing concluded — meaning an end to the highly publicized, possibly precedent-setting case is in sight.

Not surprisingly, the outcomes sought by the prosecution and the defence are very, very different.

At Ontario Provincial Offences Court in Milton, Crown attorney John Olah described Vastis, a Burlington resident, as a sophisticated

businessman who knew exactly what he was doing when he neglected to get the necessary permits before clearing about 20,000 trees on his Fourth Line property in Milton, near the Oakville border.

Olah tried to impress upon the court the seriousness of Vastis' actions, and recommended that he be ordered to replant the forest — to a tune of about half a million dollars — and pay a fine of up to \$220,000, plus be subject to a probation order.

"This is perhaps one of the most serious environmental infractions that's come before the courts in Ontario," Olah said of the damage to the property that lies south of Britannia Road and north of Hwy. 407, between Regional Road 25 and Trafalgar Road.

Vastis and his numbered company were

convicted last month of 44 counts of cutting trees in a woodlot and in an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) in April and July of 2003, contrary to the Forestry Act.

Vastis pleaded not guilty to the charges in 2004.

Thursday, 22 of those counts — for cutting in a woodlot — were stayed to prevent a duplication of charges.

Vastis needs to be slapped with a severe penalty to send a message to the community that "This cannot happen again," Olah urged, adding Vastis made a calculated effort to ignore the rules.

The fact the tree clearing was done for profit to build a golf course — which Vastis continues to deny — should result in an even harsher penalty, Olah told the court.

That Vastis offered no apology is something • see **SITUATION** on page A7

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