

Affordable housing issue hits home

Mark Taylor works in Halton and wishes he could live here too.

But three ago, after growing up in Milton and living here for 25 years, Taylor had to leave the community he loved for cheaper house prices elsewhere.

"Recently, I got married and had to move out of Halton and into another community because it was more affordable," Taylor, 28, explained.

He now lives in Hamilton, but continues to work in Oakville. That, he said, presents its own set of challenges, since he has to commute about an hour to work every day.

"I have to contend with high gas prices and less time with my family," he said, adding he has two children, aged two and four months.

Taylor's not alone. Across Halton, there are individuals and families who feel forced to move elsewhere due to a lack of affordable housing — which is housing that costs 30 per cent or less of a household's gross annual income.

Tomorrow is National Housing Day, a day to focus on the ongoing efforts to provide housing solutions for people who need shelter and affordable housing.

Despite its affluence, Halton isn't immune to the challenges of affordable housing.

According to a press release issued by the Region of Halton, there's a significant disparity between the housing needs of the community and the availability of affordable housing.

It said at least 1,200 people become homeless every year in Halton, and that more than 1,500 households are waiting for government assisted housing in the region.

Unfortunately, that wait can be up to nine years long.

Since 1995, only 63 rental housing units have been built in Halton.

Halton Region's Annual Housing Report identifies a shortage of 300 to 600 units of affordable housing and 400 to 800 units of assisted housing in Halton in 2004.

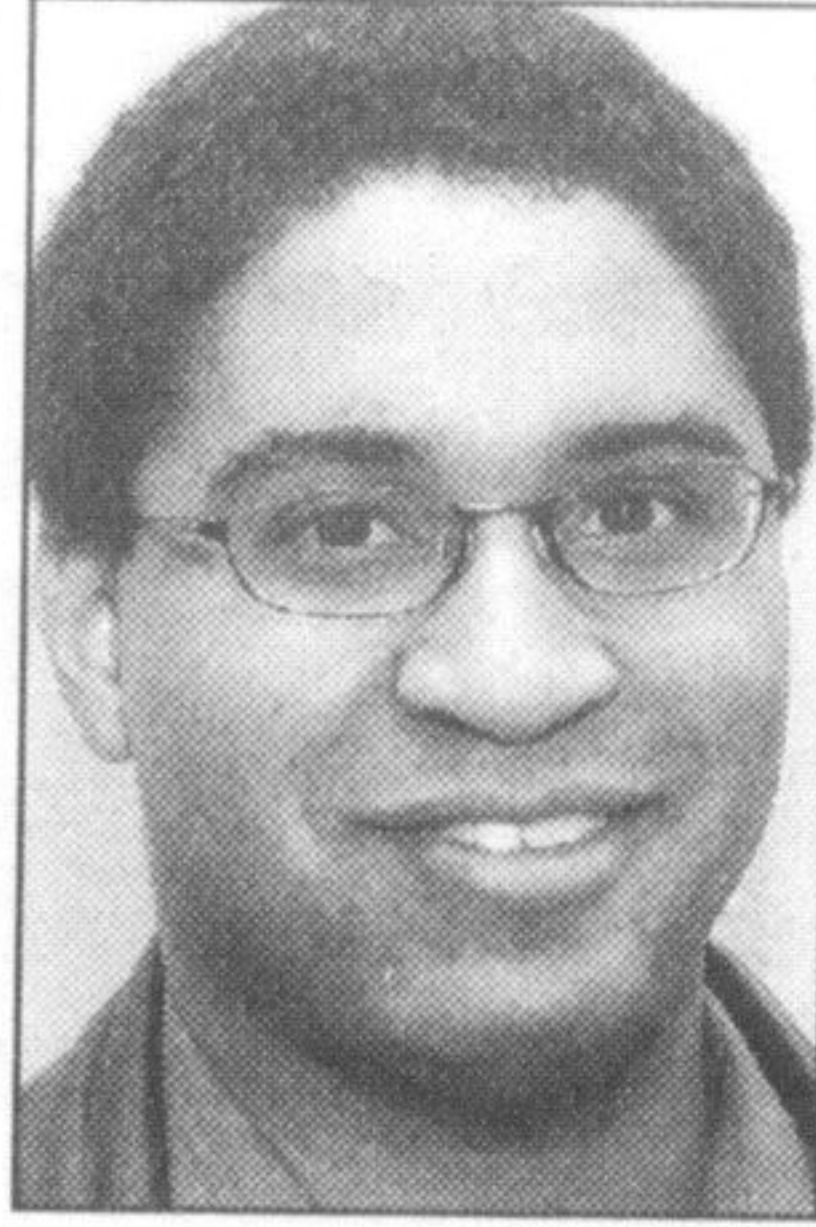
As a result, low-income residents such as students, young families or fixed income seniors are often forced to leave Halton.

"As a government, Halton is charged with creating a community that's inclusive, socially sustainable and economically competitive," said outgoing Regional Chairman Joyce Savoline.

"Fundamental to these ideals is ensuring there are enough options among different types of housing to meet a range of housing needs. Creating more affordable housing is the key to building communities."

Halton Region developed a Comprehensive Housing Strategy that addresses housing from now until 2015. It incorporates a continuum of housing types for all incomes and all stages of life — from emergency shelters and government assisted housing to private sector affordable housing.

A major component of the strategy is to raise public awareness about affordable housing issues, as well as advocate to other orders of government to partner with Halton Region to address housing needs.



Mark Taylor

As part of this, a display will be set up at Town Hall until Saturday to mark National Housing Day and put a human face on Halton's housing needs.

The display will include a photo collage interpretation of Halton's housing situation, as well as further information.

As for Taylor, he said he'd have a better "work-life balance" if he were able to live and work in the same community. "I think it's important to have affordable housing in every region to provide people with an opportunity to do just that — work and live in one community."

Taylor's urging residents to stand up for families like his, who find it necessary to move out of Halton. "Advocate for affordable housing now," he said.

If you're interested in acting as an ambassador for Halton's housing issue, contact Jen Lenard-Benson at 1-866-442-5866, ext. 4432, for more information.

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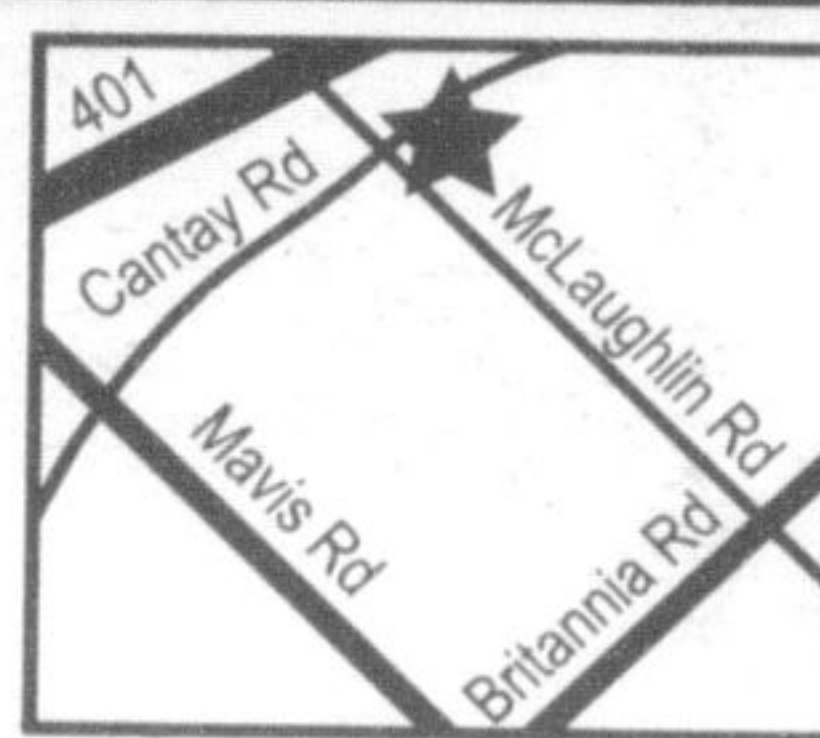
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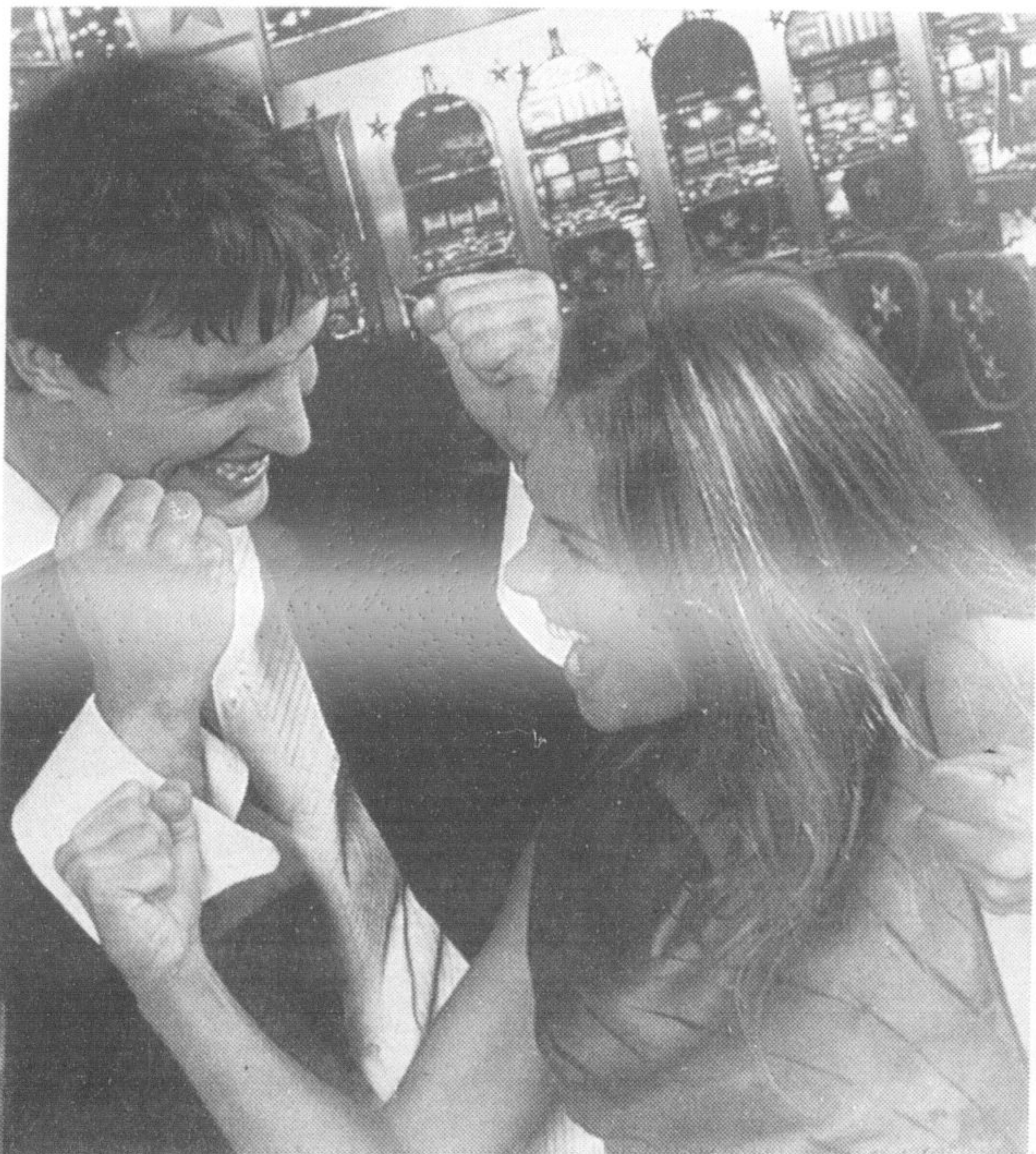
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