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COMMUNITY

On the Way to Bethlehem unique experience

Popular Christmas pageant opens Friday

By Stephanie Thiessen
 CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

The first Christmas took place 2,000 years ago, but once each year, Miltonians are invited to experience it for themselves at the On the Way to Bethlehem Christmas nativity pageant.

Country Heritage Park, 8560 Tremaine Rd., is transformed annually into Bethlehem as it was when Jesus was born.

A star rests over the stable, shepherds watch over their flock in the field, and numerous travelers seek lodging as they wind their way to be counted in the census.

This year's nativity pageant will take place this Friday to December 4, from 6:30 to 9 p.m. There's no admission charge, but a free-will offering will be accepted.

On the Way to Bethlehem is a unique experience, to say the least.

The pageant encompasses a cast of more than 185, and requires the carefully orchestrated talents of about 600 volunteers.

Reg Cressman, manager of Country Heritage Park, said his personal favourite part of the experience is seeing Christmas through the eyes of a child.

"The magic is the telling of the story to kids... the sparkle in the children's eyes as they engage with the actors," Cressman said.

But, he was quick to point out, it's not just children who marvel at the wonder of the Christmas story each year.

"It appeals to all ages," Cressman said.

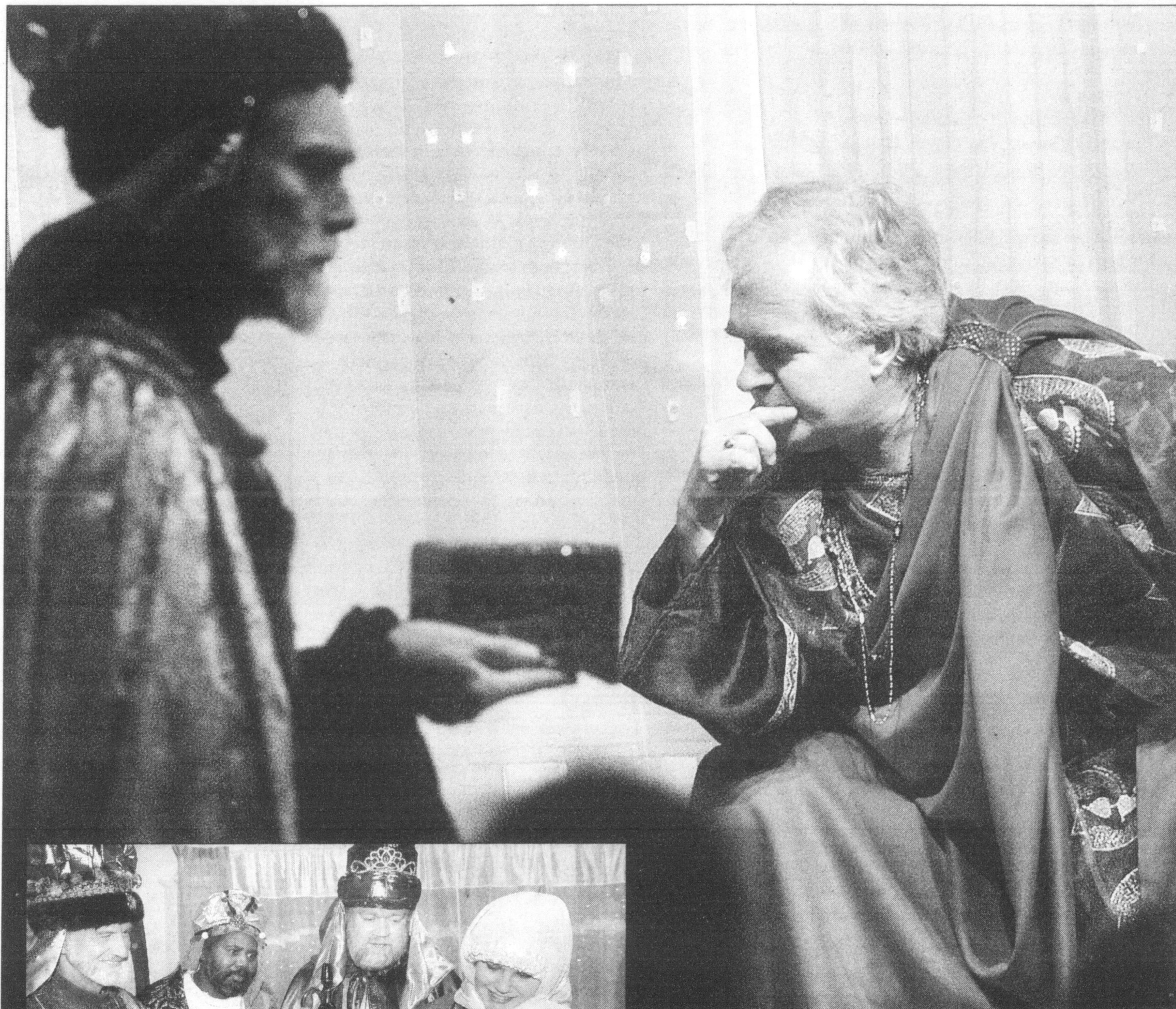
This is the fifth year of the pageant. An average of about 5,000 people visit it each year, with organizers expecting even more this time around. Busloads of visitors are coming from as far away as Tilsonburg and Leamington.

As visitors arrive, they'll be greeted in the Gambrel Barn by a mass choir performing Christmas carols. They then join small guided groups for the 30-minute journey to Bethlehem, where they'll have the opportunity to walk from scene to scene and interact with Roman soldiers, the Magi and even Mary and Joseph.

"Each one (scene) has its own charisma and communicates a unique message," Cressman said, adding he has two favourite scenes — the manger and King Herod's court.

After the journey, refreshments await.

The pageant is sponsored by Milton Area Christian Churches Working Together.



STORY OF CHRISTMAS: Above, Rob Croezen (right) plays King Herod in On the Way to Bethlehem last year. At left, Mary (Joanna Hacking) shows the baby Jesus to the three Magi (Dick Johnston, Jessie Barkley and Henry Lawson) during a 2004 dress rehearsal for the annual nativity pageant.

CHAMPION FILE PHOTOS

Charlene Douglas, 12, is preparing for her fifth year as a singing angel in the production. "The pageant always makes me feel like I'm right there in Bethlehem," Charlene said.

Andrea Rowbottom, pageant director, said she'd never have anticipated five years ago that the pageant would grow into such a large production with so many visitors.

"Most people who go say in October, 'I guess you're starting to work (on the pageant).'

Yeah right! It's year round because it's so big," Rowbottom said.

Behind-the-scene volunteers cover everything from parking to set takedown.

Many companies around town have sponsored the pageant in various ways, including donating the refreshments. With 40,000 cookies required, that's no small feat.

Those wanting to make a whole evening of the event might want to come early and enjoy a four-course, home-cooked dinner at

one of the participating churches.

Tickets are selling fast, but are still available for the dinners Sunday and December 4 nights at St. David's Presbyterian Church and Knox Presbyterian Church respectively.

The cost for the dinner is \$12 for adults and \$6 for kids. To book a seat, call (905) 864-7127 or e-mail onthewaytobethlehem@look.ca.

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Cogeco Cable Channel 14 Programming Schedule – Tuesday, November 28 - Monday, December 4, 2006

Tuesday, November 28	Wednesday, November 29	Thursday, November 30	Friday, December 1	Saturday, December 2	Sunday, December 3	Monday, December 4
8:00am - 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 12:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 4:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 10:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA
1:00pm SportsZONE Live	1:00pm Halton Hills Council (cc)	12:00pm Swap Talk (Replay)	1:00pm Halton Region Council	4:00pm TVCogeco Sports: Golden Horseshoe Bowl Semi-Final	10:30am TVCogeco Sports: Golden Horseshoe Bowl Semi-Final	1:00pm Halton Region Council
2:00pm - 6:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA	2:30pm - 7:00pm Plugged In!	1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	3:00pm - 5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	6:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	1:30pm - 6:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	3:00pm - 8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA
6:30pm Optimist TV Bingo (Live)	7:00pm Simply Halton	9:00pm Halton Region Council	5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA		6:00pm Halton Region Council	8:00pm SportsZONE Live
7:30pm Plugged In!	7:30pm Plugged In!		6:00pm Milton Community Santa Claus Parade		8:00pm Milton Community Santa Claus Parade	9:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA
8:00pm Auto Experts (Live)	8:00pm Swap Talk (Live)	11:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	7:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA		9:30pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	
9:00pm Halton Hills Council (cc)	9:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA		8:00pm Milton Community Santa Claus Parade			
10:30pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA			9:30pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA			