

Town operating 'too lean and mean to staff:' Schau

Ward 4 Councillor Wendy Schau responds to report finding that Town staff are putting in long hours, unpaid overtime to keep up with workload

By Melanie Hennessey
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Town staff is putting in long hours — including unpaid overtime — to keep up with the demands of a rapidly growing community.

The fact was presented by Kathy Davies of KPMG Chartered Accountants and in a staff report to the Town's administration and planning committee Monday evening.

While KPMG was enlisted to conduct the annual financial statement audit — which gave the Town a clean bill of health for 2006 — the company also observed municipal staff putting in some very long days.

"As you increase your growth, the volume of transactions increase," Davies said. "I think you need to take a look at your human resources."

Ward 4 Councillor Wendy Schau expressed concern with the unpaid overtime hours staff has been working to get the job done, referring to a report from the Corporate Services department that says its staff worked 772 hours of overtime in the first quarter of 2007, but 66 per cent of those hours were unpaid.

"We're running a lean and mean operation that's a little too lean and mean to staff," she said. "I think that's taking a bad advantage of people."

Town Director of Corporate Services and Treasurer Linda Leeds explained the municipality has policies that provide time-in-lieu for those who work unpaid overtime.

The committee also dealt with a report that recommends bringing on several new staff members in two-year contract positions to get the Town up to speed on processing development applications.

The positions, which would cost \$228,300 for the rest of 2007 and \$456,600 next year, would be funded through development fees, capital projects and building permit application fees.

The document raised the ire of Ward 3 Councillor Jan Mowbray, who questioned why the staff positions weren't included in the budget process last year.

"I truly believe our staff has been under a lot of pressure for quite some time. We shouldn't be having to react like this," she said. "We were irresponsible in not hiring more people last year."

Town CAO Mario Belvedere told her it's very hard to predict housing market demands.

"We have an unusual situation of dealing with a whole bunch (of applications) at one time," he said. "Our numbers are beyond our expectations."

In an interview with the Champion, he also said staff is conscious every year of the budget guidelines it must stay within. Council directs staff to prepare the budget to reflect what it would look like with zero, three per cent and five per cent tax increases.

"Because of budget constraints over the past couple of years, we haven't been able to staff for the heavy workload we're getting," he said.

Schau urged staff to take a thorough look at how much

staff is needed to run the Town well in the 2008 budget process.

Belvedere said the Town will be undertaking a comprehensive analysis of staffing needs this year.

Meanwhile, Mayor Gord Krantz expressed concern for the long-term implications of hiring people on two-year contracts.

"When was the last time a government laid off contract people? It doesn't happen, or very rarely," he said, noting the positions could result in almost \$500,000 in expenses every year from now on.

He also told council members that they "ain't seen nothing yet" when it comes to requests for additional staffing, referring to the report that will result from comprehensive analysis Belvedere mentioned.

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Wendy Schau

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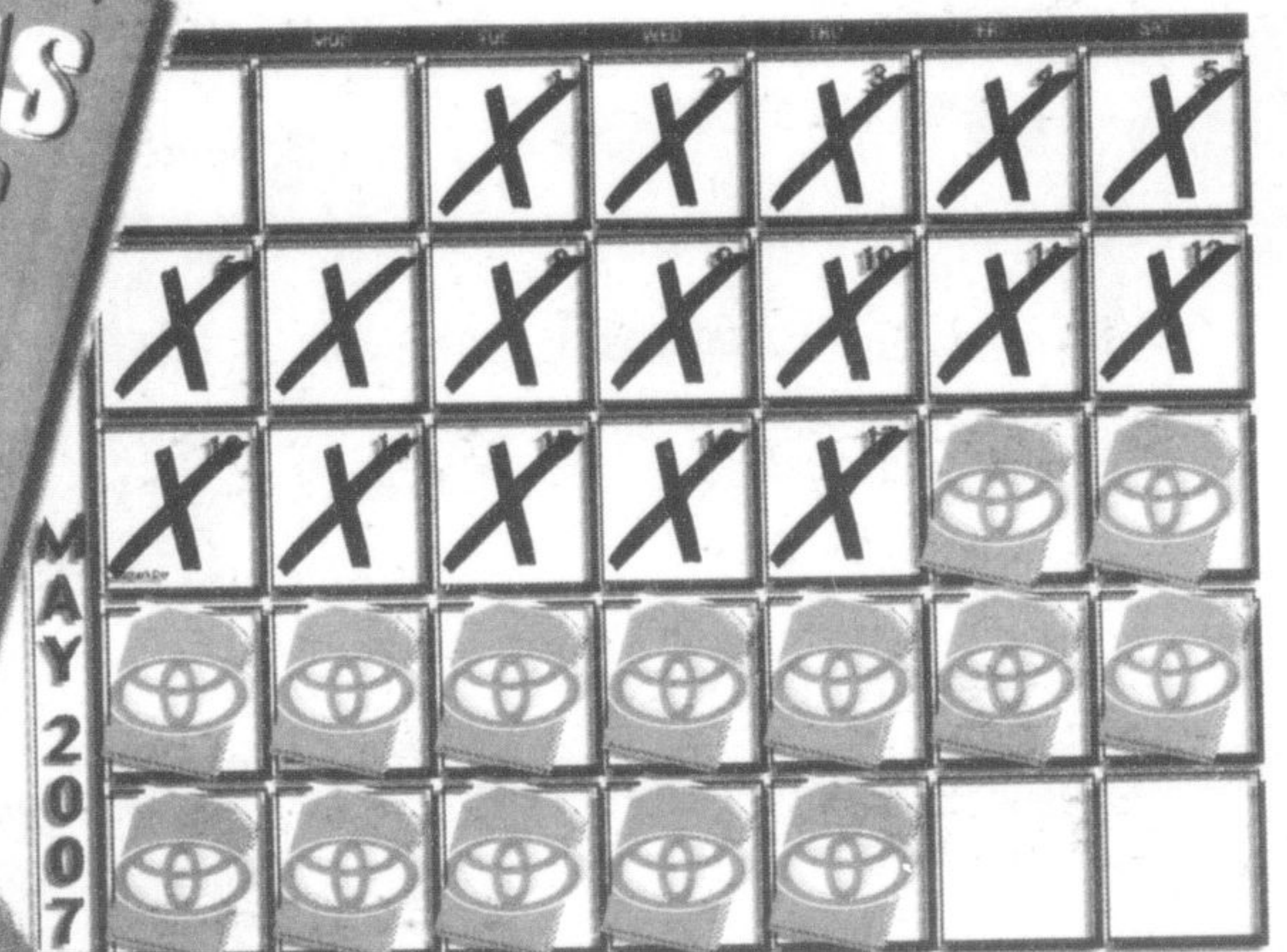
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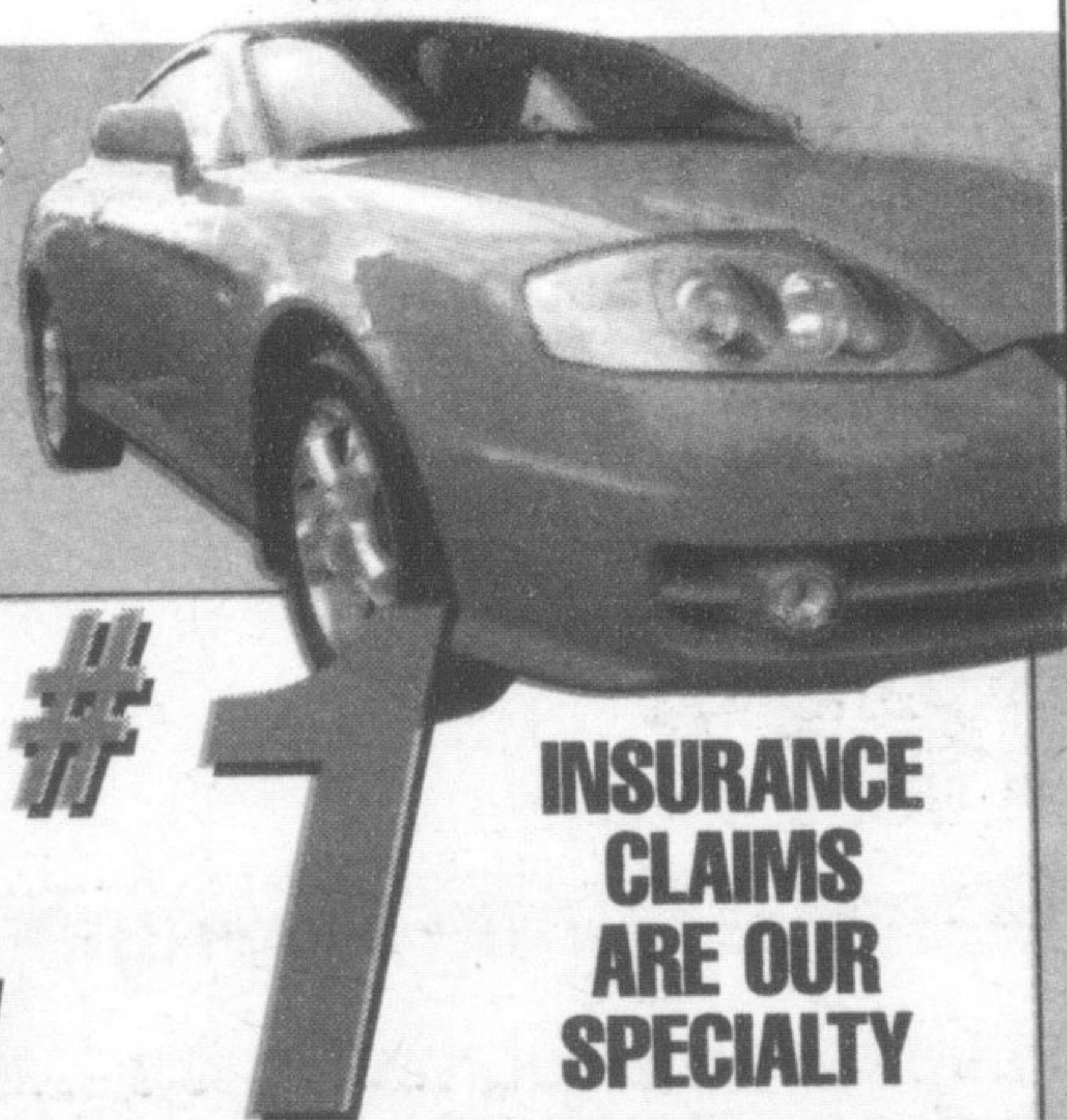
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