

# Newcomers learn about Halton's emergency services

By David Lea  
SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

Some of Canada's newest residents got an up close experience with Halton's police, fire and EMS personnel without ever having to face a life-threatening emergency by attending the second annual Emergency Services open house.

Held last Tuesday at Halton Regional Police headquarters in Oakville, the open house was based on the Emergency Services Introduction to New Canadians (ESINC) program, which is taught to new Canadians at local language instructional classes to help them understand the role of emergency services in Canada.

"What we're trying to do through this program is introduce to them all the emergency services — to show them that we work together for the betterment of them," said Michael Harrison, public education officer with the Oakville Fire Department.

"We brought them here today so they can meet us and participate and see what we're all about."

There proved to be no shortage of interest on the part of the newcomers with more

than 200 members of local multicultural organizations, English as a Second Language students and members of the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program cramming into the auditorium for the event.

Those who attended were greeted with a variety of emergency vehicles stationed in the nearby parking lot where emergency personnel eagerly explained to those interested the various features with more than a few people jumping at the sound of one police officer demonstrating his cruiser's siren.

Inside the auditorium, firefighters from the Oakville, Burlington, Milton and Halton Hills fire departments manned kiosks and dispensed advice about what to do in the event of a fire and how to get in touch with emergency services through dialing 911.

At the Oakville Fire Department kiosk, onlookers were also given demonstrations of how to set up smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

"I spoke to a lady from Serbia. She's been here for about six weeks. She can say about 10 words in English, but she was able to understand and it was so neat for her to come down and see what a North American

fire department was all about," said Harrison.

"One fellow I met today was living in Scarborough. He'd been in Canada for 18 years and he didn't even know what the fire department was all about, so as he was moving to Milton they invited him down here and now he knows."

Members of the Halton Regional Police Service, which also had a kiosk set up, were also a source of great interest with Sgt. Nishan Duraipappah, diversity co-ordinator, explaining why it is so important for new Canadians to learn about the role of the police in Canada.

"The first time they deal with us might be at the side of the road in a motor vehicle accident and as soon as they see the uniform their understandings are based on their previous experiences," he said.

Duraipappah said officers entering a predominantly South Asian community have been met with fear because in some of the residents' countries of origin the police are viewed as an arm of the state.

"Some of the most common feedback I get from officers is that some newcomers believe they have to pay for services — that

if the police arrive at their house then we're going to ask for money and we have to explain to them that that doesn't happen here," said Duraipappah.

Jahangir Amni, who recently emigrated from Russia, said the experience he had with police at the open house was much better than his dealings with the police in Moscow.

"Police in Russia, every time I go anywhere they check my documents and say, 'Why are you coming here?' They don't like different people, but the police here, no problem," he said.

Victor Sanchez, who grew up in Francisco Franco's Spain, also finds Canadian police to be a welcome change to those in his homeland.

"My country was under a kind of dictatorial regime. The police had all the powers on earth and nobody could control them, but now things have changed."

Whatever their past experiences with people in uniform may have been, at the open house Canadian newcomers showed no fear, with many posing for pictures with police and firefighters while others picked up plastic novelty firefighter helmets for their children and themselves.

## School council fraud case in court

The court case of a Halton Hills woman charged with defrauding three north Halton school councils of about \$30,000 — including two in Milton — continues this week.

Charged in February of last year, 43-year-old Brenda Pickering faces three counts of theft over \$5,000 and uttering a forged document.

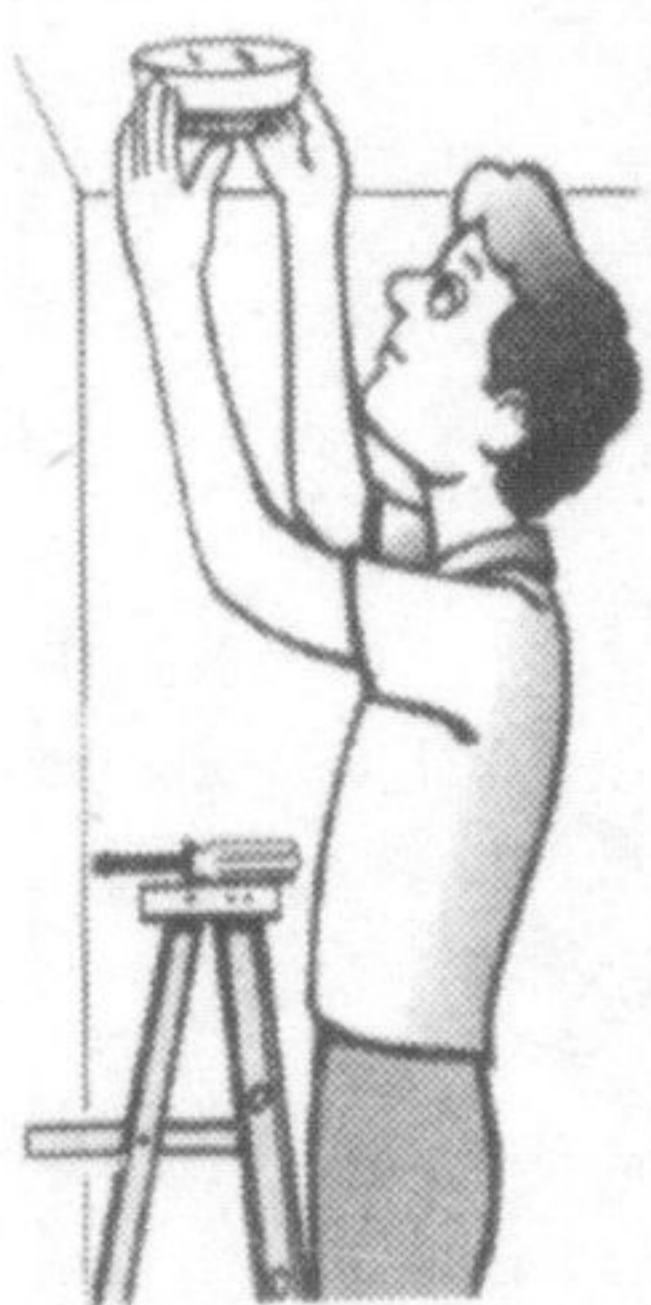
Her next court appearance will be a pre-trial hearing in Burlington court tomorrow. The date

was set May 14 in Milton.

From 2002 to 2005, Pickering served as the volunteer treasurer for the school councils of J.M. Denyes and W.I. Dick, as well as at Georgetown's Stewarttown Public School.

A police investigation was initiated after a complaint by the Halton District School Board that irregularities had been discovered in the school councils' accounting practices.

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Please Join Us On  
**Monday June 18, 2007**  
Bronte Room, Halton Regional Building  
1151 Bronte Road, Oakville

6:30 - 8:00 pm: Presentations  
8:00 - 8:30 pm: Mix & Mingle with the Delegates.  
(light refreshments will be served)

**FEATURING:**

Local Personal Disaster Response Volunteer,  
**David McCamus**

Recent responses to house fires and apartment evacuations.

Domestic Rapid Deployment Team Leader,  
**Bill Ferris**

Deployments include Northern Response (Thunder Bay) & Peterborough Floods

International Delegate,  
**Bonnie Kearns**

Deployments include Afghanistan, Hurricane Katrina and 9-11 New York

Seating is reserved. To reserve your seats please call:  
**905-845-5241 ext 106 or**  
email [phyllis.fergusson@redcross.ca](mailto:phyllis.fergusson@redcross.ca)