

# OPINION

## Surely, school board staff had to have known

Halton's public and Catholic school boards have no one but themselves to blame should angry parents come pounding on their doors in the not-too-distant future.

In an unusual move, both boards last week approved 2009-10 school year calendars that will see Halton elementary and high school students return to class the week before Labour Day (September 7).

The reason for the change is simple. After subtracting Christmas and March breaks, all the statutory holidays and six provincially-mandated professional activity days from the calendar, there are only 192 days left to teach Halton students between Labour Day and June 30, 2010. The Ministry of Education requires a minimum 194 instructional days for Ontario schools.

The resulting outrage from parents — many of whom have said they've already made summer vacation plans that extend through the last long weekend of the summer — is justified for more than one reason.

Early response from parents indicates that not all families were consulted prior to the unprecedented 2009-10 school calendar being approved last week. As the single-largest stakeholder group impacted by the decision, parents and families deserve to know why they were ignored.

To be fair to both boards, committees that studied the school calendar issue did include parent representatives from some school councils.

However, at a time when politicians speak of the importance of transparent and accountable government, some parents feel Halton's school boards didn't provide nearly enough advance notice that this year's summer break would end before Labour Day.

One Halton parent wrote, "Parents were not aware of this school calendar approval, nor were we given any opportunity to comment on this, prior to it being published in the (Burlington) Post on Friday, Feb 20. In fact, I only learned of it through the Burlington Post article on the front page. To date, we still have not any communication from our children's school on this issue, even though it was voted on and approved at the February 17 regular board meeting."

Some believe the school boards neglected to consider the repercussions of an earlier-than-normal start to the school year. Others expressed anger that the Halton boards acted almost secretly with information they likely possessed for weeks — even months — before school year calendars were approved.

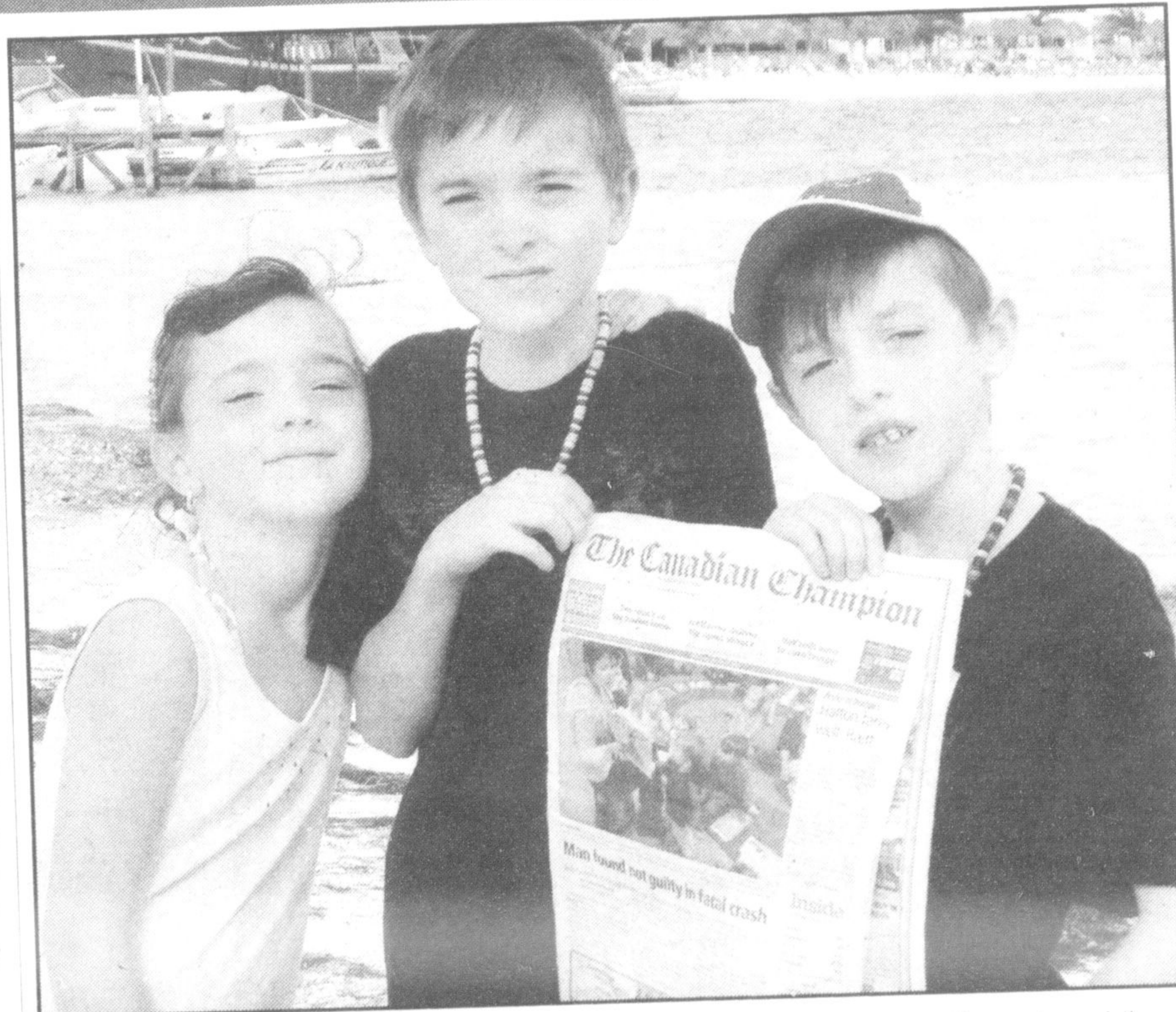
They make a good point.

Surely, school board staff had to have known — before last week — that Labour Day's late position on the 2009 calendar, combined with last year's addition of February's Family Day plus the Ministry of Education's 2006 mandate of two additional professional activity days would make squeezing the mandatory 194 instructional days into the calendar difficult, if not impossible.

It doesn't seem plausible the school boards could have been caught unaware of the logistical difficulty the next school year would bring. By not holding a more open consultation about the calendar issue, some families have been left with the perception the boards were trying to sneak through a radical change to the school year calendar. If that was the plan, they have failed miserably.

With the early-start calendars just announced, the voices of parents who are learning of it for the first time are growing in number and volume. While some have attempted to be proactive by recommending alternatives to the school calendar that has been approved, one Halton letter writer offered the following position some families may choose to take should school boards refuse to reconsider the early start to the school year.

"I think there may be a lot of empty desks the first week of school this year."



**MAKING TRACKS:** Nick, Andrew and Sophia Romano read the *Champion* while on vacation at the Oasis Palm Beach Resort in Cancun, Mexico. Take your community newspaper on your next vacation and send your 'Champion Tracks' photos to editorial@miltoncanadianchampion.com. Be sure to include destination information and everyone's name.

## Aroundtown

### Buying original art from artist you meet memorable

I've never been much of an art connoisseur.

As a child, my artistic endeavours rarely progressed beyond finger painting and paint by numbers.

But a comment from Nancy Cuttle of the Fine Arts Society of Milton (FASM) this week prompted memories of a trip to Paris and reminded me that everyone — even this artistically-ignorant reporter — is capable of being touched by art.

I was interviewing Nancy about FASM's From Heart to Hand art show, which will run March 6 and 7 at the Milton Sports Centre.

She mentioned that there's something memorable about buying original art from an artist you've met. Every time you look at that work of art, you'll remember the artist and feel a sort of connection, she said.

Which brings me back to Paris. I was in my early twenties when my sister Melinda and I decided to throw all caution to the wind and fly across the Atlantic.

For a week, we were immersed in the food and culture that's distinctly and wonderfully Parisian.

It was late summer and artists lined the Seine, easels propped and brushes poised.

On nearly every street were artists — some amateur, some professional

— hoping to sell their works to tourists like us.

One such seller caught our eyes. Not because his paintings stood out from the others, but, well, because he was handsome in that "Je ne sais quoi" sort of way.

We attempted to chat with him in our broken French and he poured on the charm, attempting to make a sale to two silly Canadians.

Needless to say, it worked. We walked away not just with an oil painting of a lovely streetscape,

but also with a photograph of that French artist.

When we got home, my sister had the painting framed and stuck the photograph of the artist in the corner.

Every time I passed by that piece of art, I was reminded of that summer trip to Paris and, of course, the artist who likely was nobody special in the world of art but who seemed to epitomize Paris.

For some reason, the experience of buying that painting outweighs those of visiting the Louvre and the Musée D'Orsay. And that painting holds a connection that a Monet print I later framed and hung didn't.

So yes, Nancy, I know exactly what you mean.

For more information on the upcoming art show and sale, visit [www.fasm.ca](http://www.fasm.ca) or see page A23.



Stephanie Hounsell

The Canadian Champion  
Milton's Community Newspaper Since 1860

555 Industrial Dr.,  
Milton, Ont. L9T 5E1

905-878-2341

Editorial Fax: 905-878-4943  
Advertising Fax: 905-876-2364

Classified: 905-875-3300

Circulation: 905-878-5947

[www.miltoncanadianchampion.com](http://www.miltoncanadianchampion.com)

V.P. — Group Publisher

Neil Oliver

General Manager

David Harvey

Editor in Chief

Jill Davis

Managing Editor

Karen Miceli

Advertising Director

Debbi Koppejan

Production Manager

Tim Coles

Circulation Manager

Charlene Hall

Office Manager

Sandy Pare

The Canadian Champion, published every  
Wednesday and Friday, is a division  
of Metroland Media Group Ltd.

Advertising is accepted on the condition that, in the event of a typographical error, that portion of the advertising space occupied by the erroneous item, together with a reasonable allowance for signature, will not be charged for, but the balance of the advertisement will be paid for at the applicable rate. The publisher reserves the right to categorize advertisements or decline.

CCAB Audited

Recognized for excellence by

ocna Ontario Community Newspapers Association

CNA Canadian Community Newspapers Association

SNM Suburban Newspapers of America

The Canadian Champion is  
a proud media sponsor for:

Halton Healthcare

Child Fund  
ONTARIO

WELCOME WAGON LTD.  
SINCE 1930

Jingle Bell Fund

MILTON SANTA CLAUS PARADE

UNITED WAY OF MILTON

MILTON CANADA DAY

MCRCC

YMCA OF CANADA

ATHENA Awards

The Oakville, Milton

MILTON GALA Awards

FAO

The Milton Canadian Champion is a Recyclable Product