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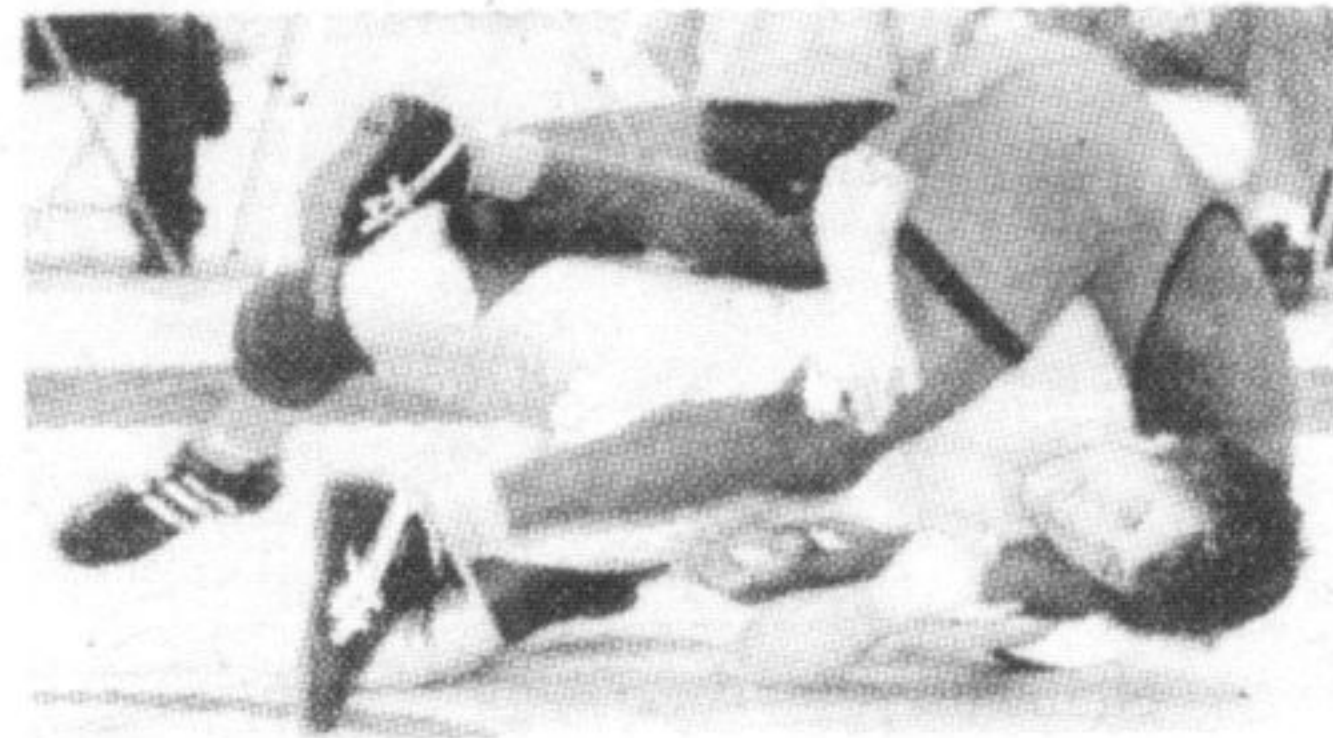
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PROUD MOMENTS: Above, 10-year-old Jenna Sonoski is presented the Memorial Cross in memory of her father, Capt. Colin Sonoski, a pilot with the Royal Canadian Air Force. Colin was killed in 2002 when his search and rescue helicopter crashed while returning from a rescue mission in northern Labrador. Presenting the medal is Major Gen. Glynne Hines with the Canadian Forces. Brother Liam, 7, and mom Sharon also received the honour during the presentation, which was held at Milton's Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 136. At right, Major Gen. Marcel Duval, also with the Canadian Forces, presents the Scroll and Bar to Colin's father, Frank, a pilot in the Second World War and a legion member.

GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION



Meritor to shut down Milton car parts plant

By Tim Foran
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

The company that initiated the rise of Milton into a major player in the auto parts manufacturing sector will shut down for good, after 55 years in operation.

Meritor Suspension Systems Co. has announced that it plans to close permanently the Steeles Avenue plant by the end of 2009, putting 165 people out of work.

Thursday's announcement by Meritor is the second major blow in recent days to Milton's auto parts sector, which employs up to a fifth of the town's residents and accounts for 35 per cent of the private sector jobs.

The local stamping plant of SKD Automotive, an insolvent company currently under creditor protection, will likely close following the sale of its assets, according to the union representing the approximate 200 hourly employees at the company's Milton operation.

Meritor and SKD are two of Milton's top 10 employers, employing close to 650 people in 2007, according to Town data.

The top two employers remain Magna-owned plants Karmax and Modatek, which together employed 1,700 jobs in 2007. Seat manufacturer Johnson Controls also has a plant in Milton, providing 200 jobs in 2007, and there are numerous other smaller auto parts suppliers.

However, it's the Meritor-owned plant that first set up shop in Milton, back when it was a small town and not Canada's fastest growing community. The facility, which makes coil springs for vehicles, started life in 1954 as Ontario Steel Products and at one time provided employment for about 500 people.

"Disbelief" was the reaction of long-time



GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

The Meritor closure will put 165 people out of work by the end of the year.

employee Pat Soulier upon hearing the news.

"I grew up in Milton and I remember this place being built," said the 60-year-old sanitation worker.

"It built Milton," added a set-up operator, who did not want to give his name.

The 50-year-old native Miltonian said his father and uncles had previously worked at the parts plant.

"It's like a family history here. It's a big blow to everybody."

That family connection also exists for 28-year Milton Mayor Gord Krantz, whose wife worked for Ontario Steel in the late 1950s and early '60s.

"I'm very sorry to hear it," Krantz said Friday of the plant's closing. "It's been a fabric of this community."

Meritor spokesperson Lin Cummins said the decision to close the Milton plant was made to reduce overall capacity and cost. The facility, which supplied the Big 3 American car companies as well as Honda

• see PLANT on page 10



MILTON DENTURE CLINIC

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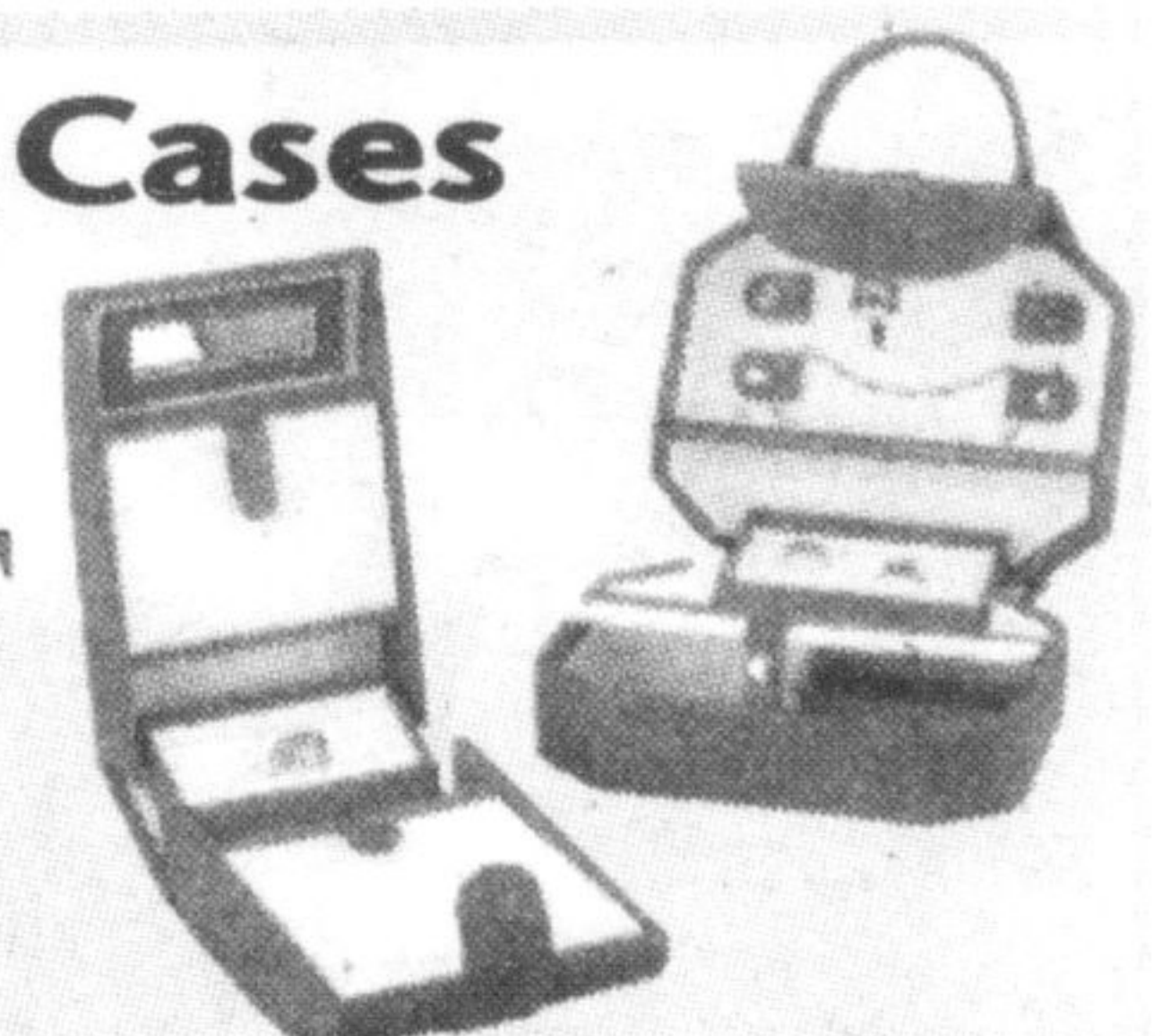
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