With growing demand for service and aging facilities, agency in dire need of upgrades, says president/CEO

By Christina Commisso CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF growing wait list, ErinoakKids is in desperate need for redevelopment.

The agency serves more than 10,000 dis-

With run-down facilities and an ever-

abled children in southern Ontario, 3,000 of

which reside in Halton. As the largest children's treatment centre in the province, demand for its services grow about 10 per cent a year, but rapid growth in Halton and Peel regions has exacerbated the demand.

In Milton and Brampton, the demand is rising 20 per cent yearly.

More than 2,000 of Ontario's most vulnerable kids are waiting for services from the agency, about 650 are from Halton. And depending on what services they're in need of, some families could find themselves waiting for up to two years.

Tough times for centre: CEO

"The reality of it is we've had to go out and rent sites in office buildings and then convert that space to treat children with disabilities. And it's really not optimal space for treating those children," said Bridget Fewtrell, ErinoakKids president and CEO.

Following a recent presentation to the Region's health and social services committee, Fewtrell asked the committee to voice its support for the \$168 million redevelopment project to the Province, to which members agreed.

Fewtrell said the organization spends almost \$2.5 million a year to lease eight sites in their service areas (Halton, Peel and Dufferin) and it owns one site in Mississauga. In Halton, ErinoakKids rents offices in Oakville and Burlington.

The organization is proposing to build three new sites — in Oakville, Mississauga and Brampton — to meet the mounting demand. Fewtrell says the money saved on rent can be used to expand services and staff, and cut wait times.

"With nine sites, you can probably imagine there's lots of travel between sites and we have to move clinicians around a lot," said Fewtrell.

And it's not just the clinicians that are being moved around. Without sufficient

space in the retrofitted office buildings, rooms have to constantly be revamped for different types of therapy. The time it takes to set up and take down equipment in a room could be up to two hours, and Fewtrell says that time could be better spent helping more children.

Many of the sites lack accessible washrooms and the elevators are too small for some of the equipment patients use. Also, many of the sites are not accessible by public transit and lack outdoor space for the young clientele

"With three sites appropriately placed to meet needs, we could save significantly in travel costs, heating and lighting and all those auxiliary costs that really add up over time," she said.

In wait-and-see mode

In 2009 ErinoakKids was given \$1 million from the Ministry of Children and Youth to create a business case for the redevelopment. The organization is now waiting on the Province to release its 10-year infrastructure plan of high-priority projects.

Fewtrell says over two decades, the cost of not moving forward with the redevelopment will end up being 69 per cent more than redeveloping.

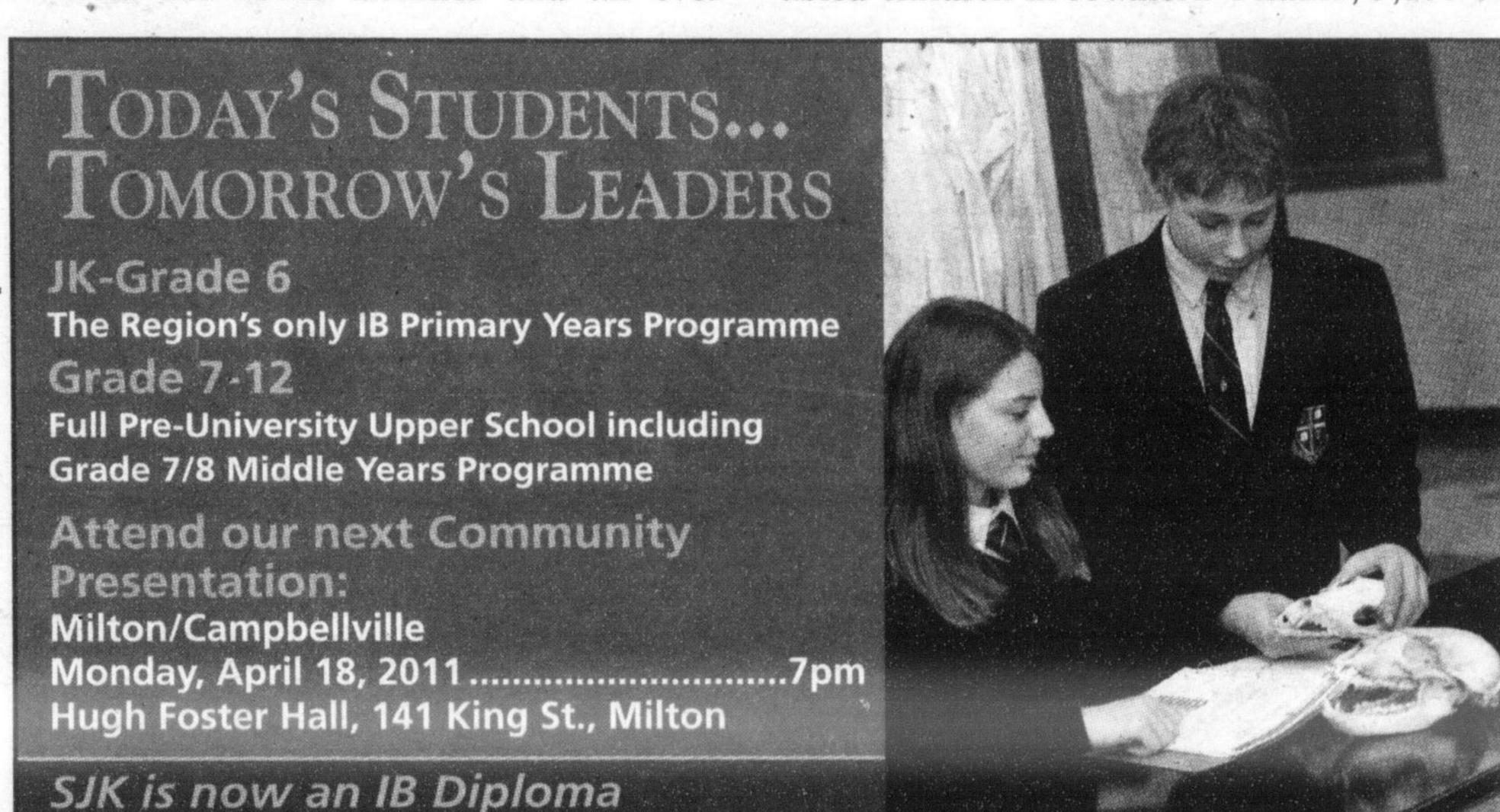
"Over the next 25 years we can redirect a significant portion of our operating budget being used to lease back into the delivery of

If approved, the Oakville site will be 61,360 square-feet and carry 30 per cent of the agency's workload.

Fewtrell said about a year of planning and three years of construction would be needed until the redevelopment is complete.

The Province is expected to release the 10-year infrastructure plan within the coming weeks.

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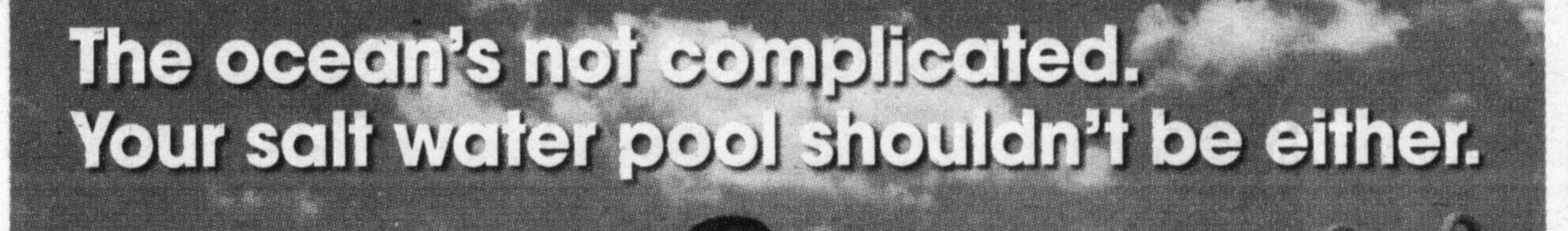
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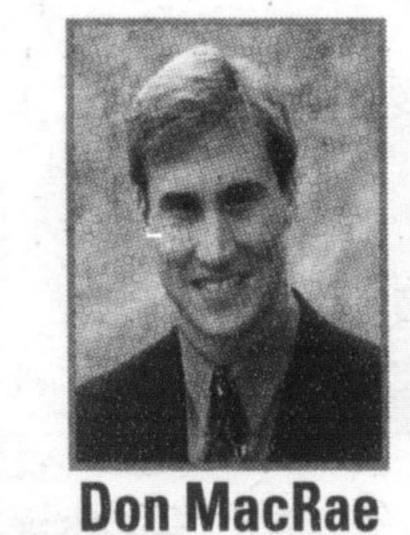
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