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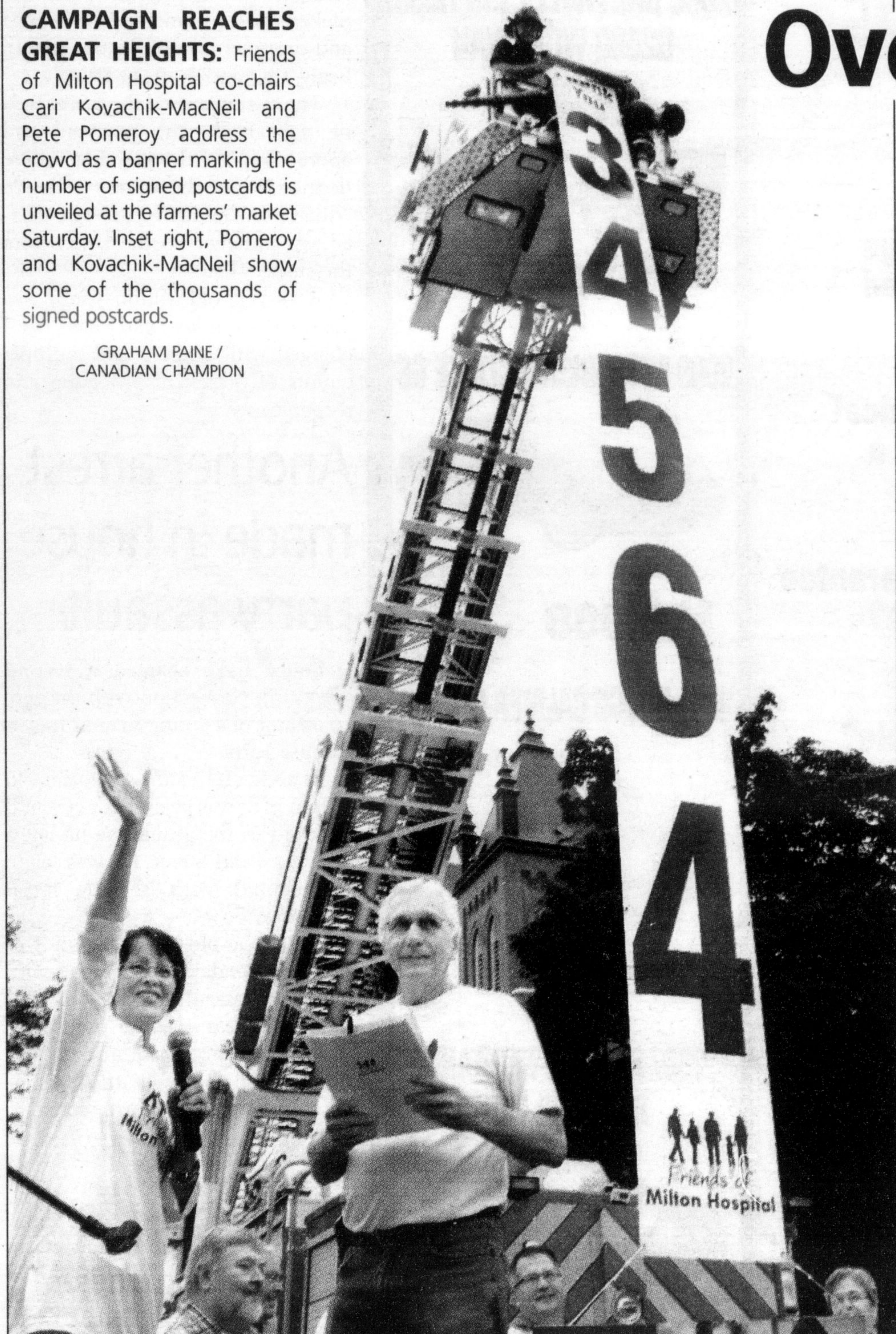
Wednesday, July 29, 2009

36 Pages • \$1.00 (incl. G.S.T.)

CAMPAIGN REACHES GREAT HEIGHTS:

Friends of Milton Hospital co-chairs Cari Kovachik-MacNeil and Pete Pomeroy address the crowd as a banner marking the number of signed postcards is unveiled at the farmers' market Saturday. Inset right, Pomeroy and Kovachik-MacNeil show some of the thousands of signed postcards.

GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION



Overwhelming support

Nearly 35,000 residents sign petition postcards in group's ongoing push for hospital expansion

By Tim Foran
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

A volunteer group dedicated to securing provincial approval and funding for an expanded Milton District Hospital says it has collected signatures from close to 35,000 people on postcards addressed to Ontario's Minister of Health.

"The incredible enthusiasm in this community is amazing," said Pete Pomeroy, co-chair of the Friends of Milton Hospital, which started its postcard signing blitz about two months ago assisted by \$25,000 in funding from the Town of Milton.

The group is now hoping to deliver the postcards personally to the Minister of Health, David Caplan, and it also wants to meet with the Minister of Infrastructure, George Smitherman. The two ministries are expected to make final decisions on which of 58 proposed hospital capital projects will get put onto an updated 10-year infrastructure plan, expected to be released this fall.

"We need a hospital (expansion), we need a place to go that ourselves and our family feel we're going to get the care that we need, they (the hospital) have the specialties that we need, that we can have faith in our hospital," said Cari Kovachik-MacNeil, co-chair along with Pomeroy.

The duo met last Wednesday to present

their case to Dr. Sacha Bhatia, healthy policy advisor to Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty.

Bhatia listened to the group's concerns but advised them they should be working with officials from the ministries of health and infrastructure and the Mississauga-Halton Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), said Karman Wong, a spokesperson from the Premier's Office. LHINs are responsible for planning, funding and integrating health care services locally.

"At the end of the day, decisions on which hospitals should get funding shouldn't be political," said Wong. "They should be based on where the need is."

The criteria for assessing that need is what concerns

Pomeroy and Kovachik-MacNeil. They said at least one criterion the Province will be using is wait time statistics for hospital emergency rooms (ER).

In this respect, statistics show Milton District Hospital fares better than most hospitals. For the first quarter of this year, the average wait time for a serious condition at the hospital ER was just under five hours, a couple hours better than the provincial average and about half the time spent by patients at hospitals in Burlington and Mississauga.

"Having said that, health care is more than emergency (service)," argued Kovachik-MacNeil. She said patients from

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