

ARTS

New arts centre to be unifying force

Director excited about new facility

By **Jeremy Grimaldi**
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

The new director of the soon-to-be-completed Milton Centre for the Arts said he has high hopes for the town's new \$24-million creative hub.

Rob Mackay, Milton's manager of cultural services, said he believes the Main Street and Thompson Road building will act as a unifying force, attracting and fostering new dance, vocal and visual artists in the town and region.

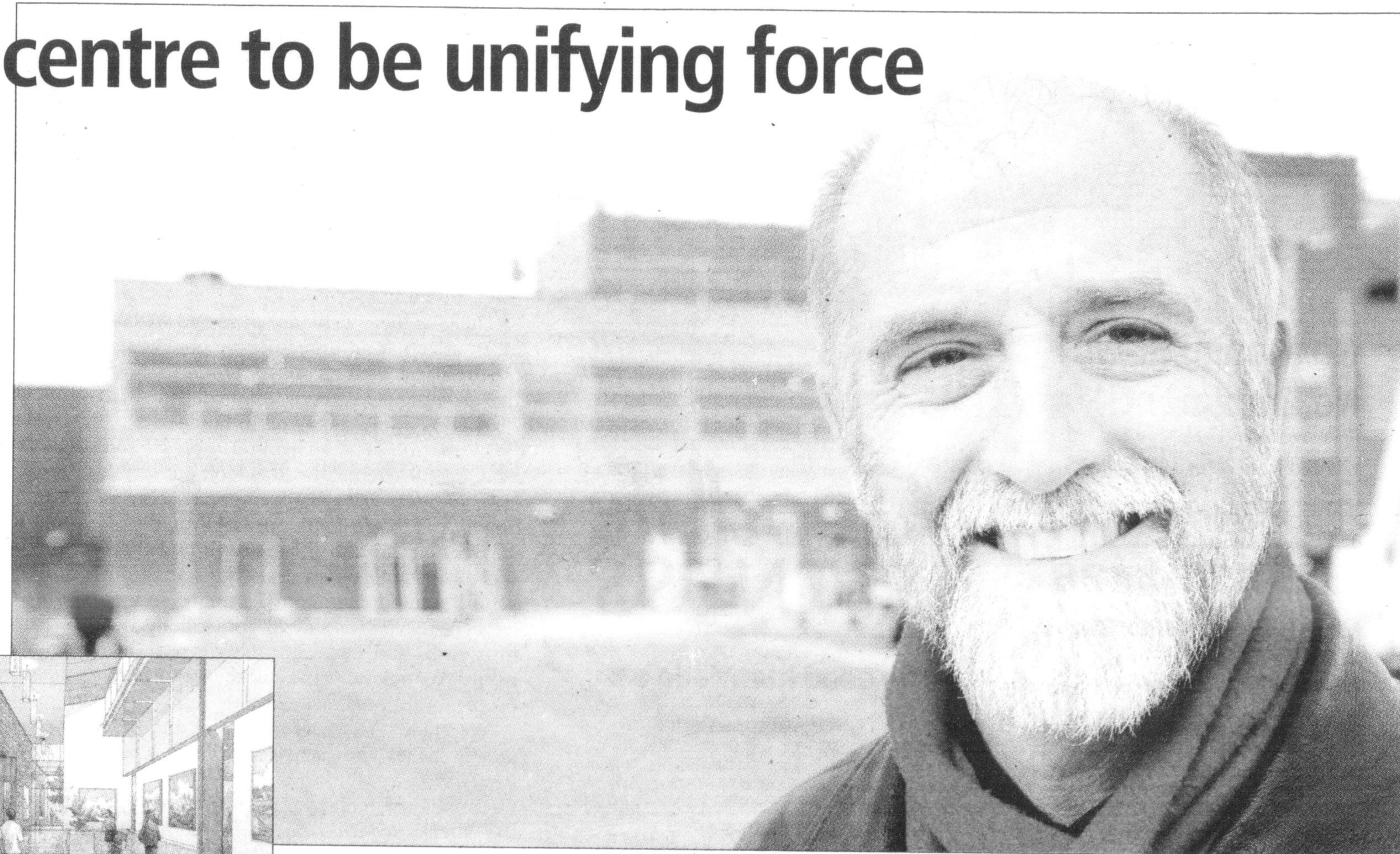
"This will be a total arts centre — a theatre, hall, exhibition space, studio along with function and meeting rooms," he said. "On top of that a library will be attached."

In other words, he said, it will be a one-stop shop for the arts and everything associated with it. "I am excited to see everything under one roof and all the synergies that go along with that."

But it's not just about what will go on under the roof that excites him. He said the building itself will be impressive.

In total, the centre will be able to seat 800, which means that large segments of the community can gather to see some of the best arts Milton has to offer — including theatrical groups, choirs, dance troops and artists.

The former director of Guelph's River Run Centre said he also thinks the building, most of which will be



EAGER ANTICIPATION: Above, the Town's new manager of cultural services, Rob Mackay, stands in front of the partially completed arts centre and central library. At left, a sketch shows what the arts centre will look like on the inside.

GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

completed by February, couldn't have come sooner for a town of 80,000 largely devoid of cultural institutions.

"The town desperately needed a state-of-the-art facility and the equipment that will come with it."

However, he warned people not to expect Broadway musicals to be shown at the centre.

"I hope people don't expect the Lion King. We will have some professionals, but first and foremost it will be about local artists.

"We won't back a professional

season until community groups have given us their booking times first."

More than anything, he said, the centre will help enrich the lives of people, from youngsters to senior citizens.

"This will be a different type of community centre. When you experience the arts, it should leave you a little bit changed," he said.

Mackay said he believes Miltonians should make more time for the arts. "Sure it's easier to stay at home sometimes and just watch television, but when you go out to the

theatre, there is a personal benefit that leads to a much richer society.

"I think at the end of it all it allows people to be more introspective. It also helps us to realize that life is not always about economics."

He said he believes the performing arts are simply another way to tell stories and pass on life lessons.

"When people read books they could learn lessons and say to themselves, 'Wow that's what I should be doing,'" he said. "Well with arts it's the same thing."

In total, Mackay projected that some 100,000 people will visit the

centre in the first year, coming to see some 20 locally-based performing arts groups and 15 artists exhibit their work.

He said he sees his task as a "facilitator," bringing user groups in and removing hurdles so the centre "can offer something for everyone."

The centre is expected to officially open September 1, however there will likely be prior events.

Anyone wanting to find out more is asked to visit www.milton.ca or call (905) 878-7252, ext. 2211.

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