

Those with disabilities vulnerable: Ziembra

By DENNIS GIBBONS
Special to The Champion

People with disabilities are especially vulnerable to the discrimination which exists in today's workplace.

Citizenship Minister Elaine Ziembra delivered that message in her keynote address at a Halton Multicultural Council conference in Burlington Tuesday. The conference, entitled, "Working Towards Equity In a Multicultural Society," is part of Race and Ethnocultural Equity Week.

"People with disabilities don't even get in the front door," she said.

"These people often get only contract positions, not full-time."

The minister identified visible minorities, people with disabilities, and First Nations women as the groups which need more help under the Human Rights Code. "I would say employment equity is not controversial, it's about fairness."

Ms Ziembra also said most recent figures show that women earn only about 64 per cent of what the average man in the workplace earns. The minister said the Ontario government has recognized that the Ontario Human Rights Commission is not working properly and has set

up a 33-person task force charged with the responsibility of eliminating the tremendous backlog of cases.

She said an effort is being made to upgrade the qualifications of commission staffers. A second task force has until June 30 to come up with recommendations on how the procedure part of the Human Rights Code can be improved. But, she said the government also has a grave responsibility to make itself more accessible to the people, to set an example.

The minister outlined establishment of the new Ontario Anti-racism Secretariat, but cautioned

that the key to stamping out racism is having individuals take a stand.

"We know that racism exists, we don't need any more studies," she said. "We have to start to make sure that government ministries are providing equal access to services."

In response to a question from the floor, the minister said changes are needed to make it easier for immigrants with high skills to use those skills in Ontario without delay.

The questioner had complained that doctors and practising engineers, in particular, who come to Canada with degrees from their countries of origin shouldn't necessarily have to face three or four more years of training before they can start practising.



Elaine Ziembra



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Bird watchers with an eye toward assisting the expansion campaign at Mounstberg Wildlife Centre, can combine their hobby with raising funds.

The second annual Big Birdwatching Bonanza encourages birdwatchers to obtain pledges based on the number of species seen in the park during the May migration. Last year's project raised more than \$1,000.

At the Mounstberg wetlands, watchers can see as many as 70 different species in a single day. People who need help identifying species can get help from Mounstberg staff members. Two observation platforms are available at the centre's lake. Mounstberg is currently involved in a \$600,000 fundraising effort that will be supported by the sponsored birdwatchers.

A birdbanding program and a birds of prey rehabilitation centre operate at the centre. Mounstberg is one of the Halton Region Conservation Authority properties.



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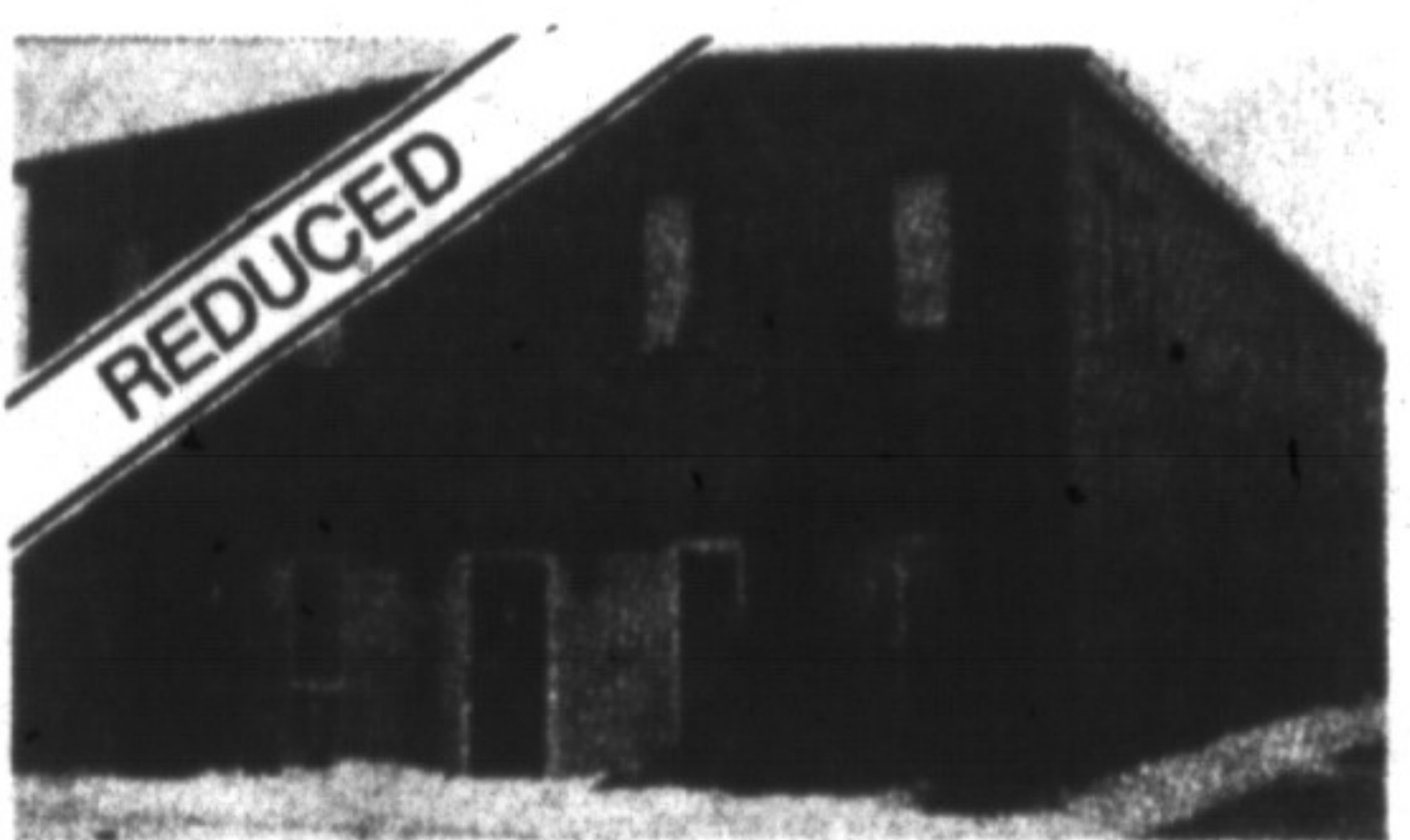
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