

COMMENT

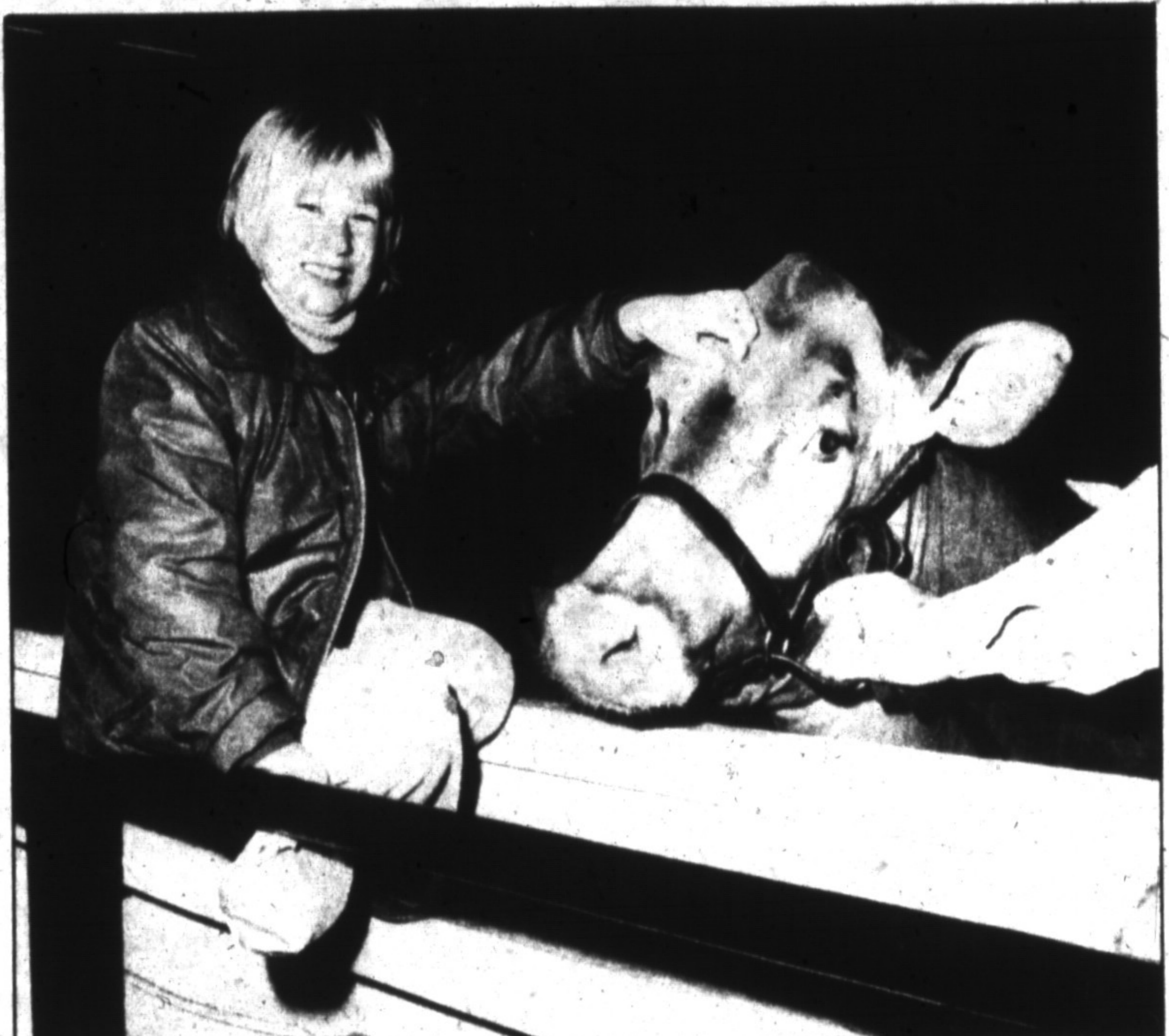
THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

Box 248, 191 Main St. E.,
Milton L9T 4N9
878-2341
Toronto Line 821-3837
Fax - 878-4943
Classified Advertising: 875-3300

Ian Oliver Publisher
Nell Oliver Advertising Director/
General Manager
Jane Muller Editor
Karen Huisman Circulation Manager
Teri Casas Office Manager
Tim Coles Production Manager

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LOOKING BACK



Local fall fairs will soon be underway, serving as a prelude to the annual Royal Winter Fair. Back in October 1979, this prize winning cattle entry gets some attention from a young event visitor.

Questionable start

It's nice to hear that the Halton Regional Police Service senior personnel accused of wrongdoing with regards to a 1983 alleged cover-up have been cleared of any criminal charges.

It remains disturbing, however, to contemplate the actions of Halton Hills regional councillor Pam Johnston throughout this episode, the bulk of which now appears to be over.

It was Ms Johnston who dropped the anonymous letter containing the allegations on the desk of regional councillors a few minutes before the June 3 council meeting.

It was Ms Johnston who basically called Halton police Chief James Harding a dinosaur a few weeks before that — saying she didn't think he was "the right person to lead us into a non-violent society."

It was Ms Johnston who then steadfastly refused to back up most of her incendiary remarks, hiding behind "no comment" replies while she termed other people threatening, hostile, or aggressive if they pressed her to be accountable.

At one point columnist Rob Kelly praised Ms Johnston in this newspaper for standing up to Chief Harding when Chief Harding was wrong. That was in the first clash between the duo, in which Ms Johnston rightfully protested Chief Harding's high-handed and confrontational attitude with regional council.

But it should also be remembered that we took the Halton Hills councillor to task soon after, when she suggested Chief Harding was unsuitable for his job. We saw that criticism as unwarranted.

We also seriously question the judgement, at least, of a second-term regional councillor who drops a letter full of devastating allegations on the desks of regional councillors minutes before a formal meeting, with no introduction, no recommended course of action, no back-up material — nothing. And to top it all off, Ms Johnston quit that meeting before the matter was even discussed, saying she didn't expect it to be aired publicly.

Just what did she expect? In our most recent interviews with the councillor her most common reply to queries was "no comment." She even backpedalled on her confrontations with and characterizations of Chief Harding, saying, "I've got nothing against Harding. I don't even know the man."

But a few weeks ago she knew him well enough to say he was not on the same page as more progressive police thinkers.

Ms Johnston's behaviour has featured an odd mix of outspoken public comments followed by rabbit-like timidity when pressed for substantive details.

We are aware of many shortcomings in the various individuals who have been central figures in this controversy. The press has been aggressive, as usual, perhaps to a fault in some instances. Some police officers have been overly defensive and emotional. Politicians have largely shown restraint — perhaps too much restraint when it comes to criticizing their colleagues Ms Johnston.

But to some extent or another all these parties have staked out public positions on the matter, have offered some measure of accountability. Ms Johnston has been conspicuous in her efforts to avoid a similar personal reckoning.

PAGES OF THE PAST

One Year Ago

From the July 10, 1991 issue

□ Springridge Farm's annual Summer Festival for the United Way didn't seem to miss the strawberries. About 4,000 people attended and \$2,500 was raised. In previous years, money had been raised through the sale of strawberries, however the crops had come early that year. Instead 50 cent tickets were sold for certain festival activities. The festival included a craft show and sale with 25 exhibitors, live entertainment, wagon rides and a celebrity barbecue. Laura and John Hughes, the owners of the farm, were delighted with the turnout.

□ Councillors on Halton Region's health and social services committee had a first chance to see sketches of the future new and improved Halton Centennial Manor. The long-awaited redevelopment of the senior citizens home was scheduled to begin in August. The intent of the reconstruction was to move away from the boxy, block-like setting to what was seen as a warmer, more intimate environment. Upon completion in three years time the Manor would house only 200 residents, while it was presently home to about 350 senior citizens.

□ Milton was chosen as the sole trial site in North America for the most modern portable phones in North America. Beginning in August BCE Mobile Communications, a subsidiary of Bell Canada, planned to scatter about 500 phones throughout the Milton area with people such as doctors, dentists, salespeople and busy homemakers. The phones were as small as a wallet and could be carried around easily in a coat pocket or purse. Milton was chosen as the trial area because it had the right profile of potential users and its urban core was in a compact area bounded by Steeles Avenue and Bronte, Thompson and Derry roads.

20 Years Ago

From the July 12, 1972 issue

□ It was announced that a farmer's market featuring about 25 booths selling fresh fruit and vegetables, cheese, home-made candy and other wares be launched in Milton on Saturday, July 22. The Milton Chamber of Commerce, who organized the venture was hoping to keep the market operating every Saturday morning until Thanksgiving weekend. "Mayor of the market", Andrew Frank said that the Chamber had received nothing but favorable comments about the market. The Chamber wouldn't be making any money on the project as rental fees would be spent on advertising the market.

□ Local residents were treated to an unusual phenomenon when they witnessed a major eclipse of the sun, which takes place only, when the moon, sun and earth are in line. The eclipse was clearly visible from Milton. It was the last expected until 1979. After that it would be the 21st century before another would be visible in Canada.

50 Years Ago

From the July 9, 1942 issue.

□ The Princess theatre had an added attraction on Saturday night as Miss Shirley Elliot entertained with tap-dancing. It was greatly enjoyed by the large audience.

□ Speed laws were being broken in Burlington again after a lull of two weeks or more. Chief Lee of Burlington declared that from a standpoint of patriotism, motorists should obey the 40-mile-an-hour regulation. "Too many motorists are breaking the speed laws on both highways and town streets," he said. He warned that offenders would be hauled to court.

PUD

BY STEVE NEASE

