



# COMMENT

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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## Focus GTA debate locally

Halton Region began last week hammering out a position on municipal reform using the context laid out by Dr. Anne Golden in a recently released report.

Monday night at Milton's town council meeting, Nassagaweya councillor Barry Lee kicked off an informal discussion outlining the debate. Mr. Lee said that all the talk, facts, innuendo and hints he has heard suggest the five upper tier regional municipalities are history and most of their responsibilities will rest in pieces with local municipalities. These changes are major and likely to happen fast. Already the business of municipal government is grinding to a halt because of uncertainty regarding future powers and responsibilities.

Mr. Lee refused to shed any tears for regional government and suggested work done at Halton Region to formulate a position should take a back seat to similar efforts at the local level.

He is right.

However, given that Mr. Lee never fails to seize an opportunity to distinguish Nassagaweya from the rest of Milton, one might question just what Mr. Lee means when he talks about local control.

Without Regions, the local municipalities are going to have to determine what they can realistically take on, and in what context they will be able to operate. Should Milton attempt to run Allendale with only the local tax base for funding? Should new, more realistic boundaries be negotiated? Should Milton amalgamate with Burlington, Flamborough, Halton Hills, Mississauga or Oakville to spread the cost of services? Will the current geographical monstrosity of Milton pull itself apart over perceived differences in focus between urban and rural residents?

According to Mr. Lee the focus in any amalgamation or joint service project should be on the level of municipal debt per capita.

He is right again.

Figures released by Peel Region's financial department suggest huge tax increases for Milton in both residential and commercial taxes if Milton joined in GTA tax pooling. Those numbers would seem calculated to frighten taxpayers into maintaining the status quo. They are simply unrealistic because they don't take into account any changes to Metro Toronto's skewed tax assessment. That tax problem is what fueled much of this debate for reform.

Any attempt by council to cocoon and wait for big, bad government to go away will fail miserably. Changes will be mandated. Geography suggests Milton cannot remain a small town forever. Economics suggest Milton will not likely grow substantially for perhaps another decade. History suggests you are better to be mindful of the tide you are riding. Swimming against the current gets you drowned.

The reform task is so wide ranging the provincial government will likely ignore any municipality it feels is functioning in a responsible, cost-effective manner. The urban Town of Milton can use that vacuum to position itself for the future to allow for managed growth. The outlying rural communities can use that vacuum to align themselves with whatever community they feel best represents their interests.

There is an advantage to being on the edges of the GTA proposal. Not only do Halton's local municipalities, with the exception of Oakville, have more options than those towns and cities closer to Metro, but if they play the provincial government's game they might actually get a chance to determine their own futures.

It would seem Mr. Lee has fired the first shot across the bow of the good ship Milton. Mayor Krantz suggested council must decide the best course of action. Given the hodgepodge of conflicting interests at the council table and the conflicts between urban and rural Miltonians, consensus might not be possible. The local ship of state is in for some rough waters. Without some skillful and determined navigation it might sink itself.

— Brad Reaume

# Looking Back



Four lovely Hawaiian belles wiggled and giggled as they performed an exotic hula-hula dance in February 1961 at the John Milton I.O.D.E. Hawaiian Holiday dance. Strange as it may seem, they bore a faint resemblance to four local gents, but refused to release their real names to the photographer. "Just call us Miss Halli-Hulka and dancing girls," chorused their golden-throated voices as they undulated away into the night.

## Pages of the Past

### One Year Ago

From the February 8, 1995 issue

- Considered a success, the annual Milton Winter Carnival was held. Events took place at the Mill Pond, Milton Memorial Arena and the Milton Leisure Centre.

- Nominees for 1994 Citizen of the Year and four other community awards were announced by the Milton Chamber of Commerce. Father Mark Curtis, Donna Coulter and Mike Boughton were nominated for Citizen of the Year.

- The Milton Players Theatre Group staged its opening night performance of Chapter Two at the Milton Seniors' Activity Centre. Further showings were scheduled for later in the month.

### 20 Years Ago

From the February 11, 1976 issue

- The Milton Chamber of Commerce honored Dave Brush as Milton's Citizen of the Year for 1975. A crowd of 250 gathered to salute Mr. Brush. The gala was held at the

Lions' Hall.

- Marjorie MacIntosh, known as "Miss Mac," retired as head nurse in the Milton District Hospital operating room. She had worked at the hospital since it opened in 1961.

- The annual meeting of the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association was held in Milton. Delegates from Halton, Peel and York counties took part.

### 50 Years Ago

From the February 7, 1946 issue

- The Milton Junior Farmers' Association was formed. Plans were made to hold monthly meetings. Mr. H. C. Norris, manager of the Milton branch of the Bank of Nova Scotia, was scheduled to discuss banking services with the young men.

- A fire of unknown origin caused an estimated \$10,000 damage and the loss of 1,100 chicks at the Walker Poultry Farm near Milton. The Milton Fire Brigade responded to bring the blaze under control.

- The annual congregational meeting of the United Church was held in the basement of the church with good attendance. Rev. E. M. Carter presided for the meeting.

## Pud

by Steve Nease

