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NEWSLINES

Sally Ann needs you

Expect a knock on your door from the Salvation Army Monday night. The Sally-Ann's Red Shield Appeal, which features an annual door-to-door fundraising blitz, is underway.

Blitz Night Monday (May 6) will see volunteer canvassers knock on Milton doors between 6 and 9 p.m. asking for donations to support the 87 services the Salvation Army provides.

Chaired by local regional Councillor Colin Best, the Red Shield Appeal also includes a mail campaign and an appeal for donations from corporations and businesses.

"We depend on public support to help us go that extra mile and provide the quality of service that the Salvation Army is noted for," Mr. Best said.

The Salvation Army provides services that meet the basic needs of families in crisis - a food bank and low-cost clothing store - as well as acts as a referral point to the many specialized agencies operated by the organization.

However, the current economic situation and changing family circumstances are creating demands on the organization that are becoming more difficult to meet, Mr. Best said.

Volunteer canvassers would also be appreciated. The time commitment is about an hour. To get involved, call Mr. Best at 878-3623.



It was this big

Sarah Nipshagen, 8, (above) in her fourth year at the Milton Mill Pond Fishing Derby, chose her favorite spot near a tree before hauling in two trout. She is holding the largest, a one and a half pound whopper. Nicholas McCulloch, 3, (right) attending his first derby, untangles his line with a little help from 'Barney' who kept the youngster company in the cold weather.

Photos by Graham Paine



Belford defends education budget vote

Integrity of school board under question

By KAREN SMITH

The Champion

Concerns that votes cast on the Halton Board of Education budget were tainted by conflicts of interest have no legitimacy whatsoever, says Milton Trustee Flo Belford.

"If I don't vote then I haven't represented the people of Milton," said the trustee in an interview with *The Champion* yesterday.

Ms Belford, who lives with a school vice-principal, said she had every right to vote on the board's 1996-97 budget regardless of her personal relationship. Provincial law allows a person with a family member employed by a board of education to be a trustee on that board, she pointed out.

Ms Belford had reluctantly resigned from the board's salary committee in February, due to her personal relationship, and declared a conflict when the board voted on salary and benefit issues. However, she said she firmly believes that should have no bearing on her right to vote on the entire budget.

"Many trustees who declared conflicts of interest on various items which were included in the budget later voted on the entire budget," she said.

"What I'm concerned with is, is this budget going to meet the needs of the students?"

Other trustees and community groups have questioned the integrity of the board as a result of potential conflicts of interest.

"How can such a trustee squirm out from under by abstaining on a salary matter, but voting on a \$272 million budget of which 79 per cent is salary?" asked the chair of the Taxpayers Coalition Burlington's education committee, Frank Gue, in a letter to the newspaper.

"When the democratic process is subverted from representation of constituents into efforts - however well meant - to avoid conflicts of interest, those constituents are entitled to ask if they are represented at all."

The letter also said four Halton school board trustees have close family connections with board employees, thus casting a shadow over the legitimacy of 28 per cent of votes before the board.

Ms Belford, who said she has heard no complaints from constituents about her voting on the final budget, believes the issue has been overblown. She refused to discuss a confidential legal opinion obtained by the board from the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, which

"If I don't vote then I haven't represented the people of Milton."

FLO BELFORD



stated that "... a school trustee would be precluded ... from discussing or voting on the proposed reduction of school board employees' salaries if the school trustee has a parent, spouse or child who is an employee affected by the budget."

The leaked document continued, "This is especially the case where the collective agreements affected by the budget proposals are open for renegotiation ... and the relatives are covered by such 'open' agreements..."

Ms Belford's live-in companion, Ron Banyai, is a unionized board employee who would likely be affected by planned spending cutbacks.

"I won't discuss in camera matters," she said.

Mr. Gue has called for the Ms Belford's and other trustees' resignation. "The honorable thing for them to do is to leave the board and, in the public interest, give us a fresh start."

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