

Renaissance festival set to open its doors in July

The Canadian Champion, Wednesday, May 22, 1996—2

Organizer aiming for 50,000 visitors this year

By KAREN SMITH
The Champion

An English country village nestled in 20 acres of woods is about to bring the days of King Henry VIII to Milton.

Construction began earlier this week on the Ontario Renaissance Festival, a medieval country fair that will attempt to catch the ambience of the sixteenth century.

"This is a big day for us," said Jules Smith, president of the American-owned and operated festival, at a ground-breaking ceremony last Wednesday. "We're off and running."

Located on Eighth Line between Derry and Britannia roads, the festival is slated to open July 6 and will run every weekend until August 11.

The fair will be replete with theatrical performers, craft shops, food purveyors and period amusements, including a jousting field.

Mr. Smith, who operates the Maryland Renaissance Festival, said based on the event's success in the United States, he's confident Canadians will take to the idea.

"I predict that in five years this will be the biggest festival in North America," he said.

In its 19th year, the 1995 Maryland Renaissance Festival, which features more than 130 craft booths, 42 food booths, three taverns offering musical entertainment and 10 stages, attracted more than 225,000 patrons.

The Ontario festival will start out on a small scale and build over the next few years, Mr. Smith said, adding that he'll be pleased if 50,000 people attend in the first year.

The village built in a wooded grove won't be visible from the road. Just a sign and parking lot will be constructed on the face of the property.

"What you see over there now is pretty much what you'll see (from the road)," he said Wednesday.

In the village, however, performers from across the country will continuously entertain on the festival's five stages, and the streets and woods will be filled with characters.

"Our idea is to get people involved," Mr. Smith said.

"The whole idea of a renaissance festival is to touch people."

Hungry visitors will be able to feast on steak on a stake, smoked turkey legs, desserts and knave sandwiches. Beer, wine, mead and ale will be available at the festival's three taverns.

The festival is expected to create employment for 350 people, many of them students, this summer.

Tickets will be available at the entrance on festival days at a cost of \$12.95 for adults, \$10.50 for seniors (aged 62 and older) and \$5.95 for children (aged 7-15). Advance tickets will be on sale over the phone starting June 30 at cheaper rates.



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

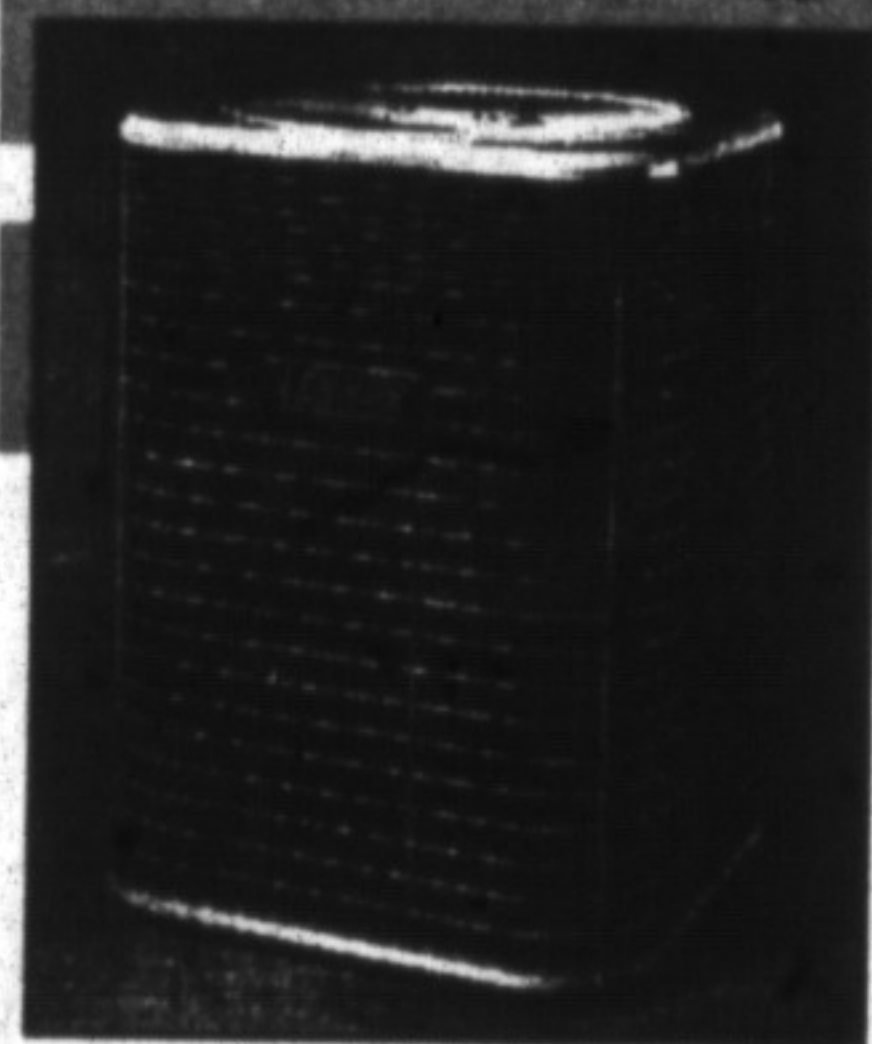
Officially kicking off the start of construction for the Ontario Renaissance Festival are Mayor Gord Krantz, Adam Smith, festival general manager, and Terence Young, MPP Halton Centre.

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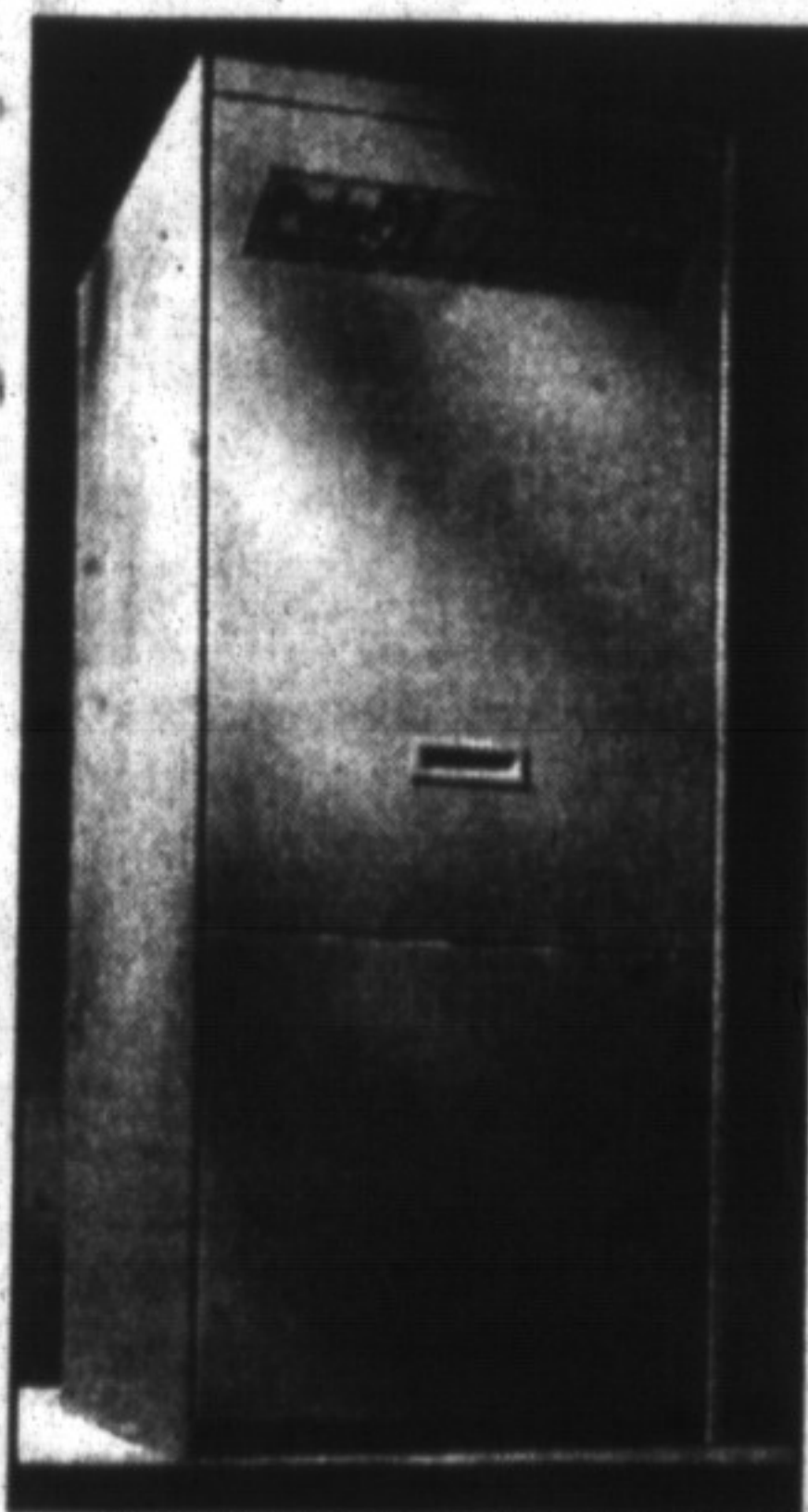
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