

BACK TO CLASS EVERYONE!

Area schools prepare for kids,
welcome new staff

See **BACK TO CLASS** Page 7

NEW! BUSINESS SECTION

Local entrepreneurs showcased,
small business supported

See **BUSINESS** Pages 17-18

BUTTERFLY GARDEN

VALIDATES LIFE

Part of Leamington cemetery transformed

See **COMMUNITY** Page 25

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Councillors talk future plans at AMO

BY SARAH FISHER

Councillors and representatives from the Town of Essex are hoping their trip to the annual Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference will result in increased support for the town's projects.

The AMO conference was held in Ottawa Aug. 13-16. Essex Chief Administrative Officer Wayne Miller, Mayor Ron McDermott, Deputy Mayor Percy Dufour, and councillors Bill Caixeiro and Peter Timmins met with ministers from transportation, infrastructure and health. The group sought information on several issues including the twinning of Highway 3, government support for the arena project and the future of Harrow High School.

AMO is a non-profit organization that represents nearly all of Ontario's 445 municipalities. It provides a variety of services to its members and hosts a conference each August. Aside from information sharing at the conference, town representatives use the opportunity to book appointments with provincial ministers.

HIGHWAY 3
On the list of information the group sought from min-

isters was an anticipated start date for widening Highway 3.

"We were looking to seek assurances that the Highway 3 twinning would be proceeding next year, and that Phase 1 would be from Manning Road to County Road 23," Miller said Aug. 23 about the group's meeting with Minister of Transportation Donna Cansfield. "She was not in a position to make that promise at this point."

Although Cansfield couldn't give a specific start date, Miller and Dufour said the group was confident the project would start this year and that Essex would be included in Phase 1 of the widening.

During a recent trip to Windsor, Cansfield, accompanied by Essex MPP Bruce Crozier, said the twinning would start soon. An engineering report on the widening from Windsor to Leamington is being studied and Crozier suggested construction could begin in the spring of 2007. The cost of the entire widening project is estimated between \$24 million and \$30 million.

SEE
AMO CONFERENCE
PAGE 3



END OF SUMMER FUN – Kole Mackenzie, 14, hops onto a railing at the Essex Skateboard Park Aug. 25. Mackenzie and some friends enjoyed an afternoon of skateboarding in the final days of summer vacation before returning to school Sept. 5. Please turn to page 7 for this week's Back to School section.

Businesses benefit from tax changes

BY FREE PRESS STAFF

The Town of Essex is implementing tax changes that may result in a decrease for some business owners.

The mill rate for the Business Improvement Area in 2006 has been adjusted for owners of properties termed industrial. The rate for the industrial class will now be the same as it is for commercial property owners.

The decision to reduce the rate was made during a council meeting in January.

Councillors also decided that the maximum levy that can be charged to area businesses will be \$8,000.

Chief Administrative Officer Wayne Miller says council discussed the change after it heard from residents concerned about the BIA fees for Iler Lodge. The long-term care facility and rest home had been paying \$13,000 a year for the BIA fee.

Industrial businesses had also been paying a higher rate because their general tax rate was higher.

Miller says the decision could reduce the BIA levy for industrial business owners by half.

Businesses may have also received a letter informing them of changes in the cost of garbage collection.

In the past, the cost of garbage collection was levied against all residents as part of the general mill rate. In January, council decided the fee should apply only to residents and businesses that benefit from the service. Industrial businesses typically pay for private garbage collection.

Starting with the 2006 tax year, the cost of garbage collection will be covered by residential and commercial property owners. Industrial businesses will no longer pay for the service.

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