

CRITICAL TIMING

Transportation minister visits
Ruthven greenhouse

See NEWS Page 6

FROM STRIKES TO SERMONS

Church converts bowling pins
to prayers

See COMMUNITY Page 10

HOCKEY HIGHLIGHTS

73's lower Flags to half mast,
win quarterfinals

See SPORTS Page 18



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Free Press Photo / Daniel Schwab

ALL ABOARD! – Hershey "Papa" Latner introduces six-year-old Scott to his interactive miniature electric model train set that includes an operating amusement park, a rural farm and urban setting.

Latner, from Hamilton, was one of many out-of-towners who brought displays to a model train and toy show held at Essex District High School over the weekend. The event was hosted by Heritage Essex, and also featured a variety of antiques and collectables.

Council reviews 2007 draft budget

BY ANDY COMBER

Essex Town Council is going to take a week to examine details of the town's 2007 draft budget before deciding on where to begin cutting costs to avoid a significant hike in property taxes.

"I can't see us getting to a zero," said Mayor Ron McDermott when asked to speculate on property tax increases following a presentation of the draft operating and capital budget made by town's treasurer Donna Hunter, Feb. 26.

"If we can get it under three per cent, we'll be happy," said McDermott, "A week from now, we'll know where we are heading."

Hunter's overview indicated that \$585,000 would have to be cut from the 2007 draft budget, as it stands, in order to achieve a three per cent increase in base property taxes.

"To attain a zero per cent increase in base property taxes, the budget cuts required would be \$865,000," said Hunter, who cautioned council that the 2006 "actual" figures were not final.

"Right now we are under budget, but not significantly," she said.

If left untouched, the draft budget would represent a 9.4 per cent increase in the base mill rate for 2007. Based on an average home assessed at \$200,000, that translates into \$1,339 in property taxes, an increase of about \$114.

"That's not where we want it to be," said Hunter, who provided summaries of where cuts had already been made in department budgets.

In the draft, except for health services, operating expenses by department financed by taxation increased across the board for a total of \$16.9 million, up 4.8 per cent, or \$770,000 over last year.

Public works is seeking a 5.9 per cent increase in operating expenses, up \$151,000, for a total of \$2.7 million.

Protection to persons and property, including fire, police, building and animal control, rang in at just over \$5.9 million, representing a four per cent increase.

Environmental services for garbage/compost collection and disposal, added up to \$2.2 million, an increase of 10.3 per cent, in the draft document.

SEE COUNCIL, PAGE 2

Taxpayers cautioned about tax sheltered gifting programs

BY ANDY COMBER

A local tax professional is cautioning people about certain tax shelter gifting and donation programs, including gifting trust arrangements the Canadian Revenue Agency (CRA) calls "risky."

"If you haven't taken part - don't," said Paul Foster, an Essex-based chartered accountant, speaking of

donation programs or gifting trust arrangements where charities issue a donation receipt for three or four times the donor's cost, resulting in a tax refund that exceeds the cost to the donor.

"It can't hurt to check with the CRA," said Foster, noting that the CRA routinely issues and updates taxpayers alerts.

SEE DONATION, PAGE 3

New environmental committee to advise council

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

Essex Council agreed to endorse the creation of a local environmental committee Feb. 19.

In a presentation led by former Essex Deputy Mayor Percy Dufour and committee member Phil Rogers, council was told the committee would act in an advisory role, providing expert suggestions on local environmental matters.

Members of the committee would include people involved in the University of Windsor scientific community and the Harrow

research community.

The group would also act as a liaison between council and the Windsor Essex County Environmental Committee (WECEC).

The WECEC currently works on environmental issues regularly with Essex County Council, but Dufour and Rogers stressed the importance of creating a local group to focus on matters directly affecting Essex.

"The problem is, there's a lot of presentations made to WECEC, but they don't make it back to the municipalities," Dufour said.

SEE EXPERTS, PAGE 2



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