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**BALLOON RISING** – "Mad" Mike D'Asti of Mad Science of Windsor creates a hot air balloon using a hair dryer during a demonstration for kids at the Essex Library March 16. D'Asti, a "chief mad scientist", performed experiments at four Essex County Library locations while students were off school last week. Ticket proceeds from the events will support the Canadian Diabetes Association.

## Businesses want out of BIA

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

About 30 local business owners have signed a petition calling for the dissolution of the Essex Business Improvement Area.

The petition, which has been circulating throughout the town for the past week, has been signed by business owners from the retail, commercial and industrial sectors of Essex.

Titled, "Dissolve the BIA," the petition states, "Below are the members responsible for 1/3 of membership, (50 per cent of levy collected) of the BIA of Ward 1 and request the by-law be repealed that enforces this board in Ward 1, in the municipality of Essex."

Currently, it is mandatory that all business owners in Essex, about 200, pay a BIA levy based on their municipal tax assessment.

Strong support for the petition came from the industrial sector.

"I think manufacturing doesn't relate to the BIA," said Bernard Plant, one of the owners of Forest Machine and Manufacturing Inc. "I feel the BIA relates to

retail. It's not that we're not good corporate citizens. We want to choose where our money goes."

Plant said Forest Machine, which has been in operation for nearly 30 years, pays about \$2,000 annually to the BIA.

He said many of the services offered by the BIA, such as downtown beautification and street cleaning, don't apply to a business operating outside the heart of town.

"We pay a lot of taxes here and when you start adding \$1,000 or \$2,000...we're contributing to something that doesn't do anything for us," he said.

Downtown retail establishments often make high demands for "access, cleanliness and good looking curbs and fixtures" that an industrial business doesn't require, he added.

"We think (the BIA levy) is sort of being misapplied," he said. "If this petition doesn't make things happen, there will be another petition that gets manufacturing out (of the BIA)."

SEE MANDATORY, PAGE 2

## Town budget nears completion

BY ANDY COMBER

With a little tweaking, Town of Essex Treasurer Donna Hunter reported at the budget update meeting March 19 that tax increases for all wards have been reduced to less than 3 per cent.

"I have revisited the budget in detail, again," said Hunter, speaking to council of some additional adjustments made to the 2007 draft budget.

Some additional cuts,

including \$50,000 for bridge work, put the tax increase at less than 3 per cent for all wards.

Increases over the 2006 budget currently stand at 2.03 per cent for Ward 1 (Essex), 2.96 per cent for both Wards 2 and 3 (Colchester North and South), and 2.51 per cent for Ward 4 (Harrow). The municipal increase adds \$32 to \$42 to residents' tax bills, based on an average home assessment of \$200,000.

Hunter said she is looking

for "more direction" from council on any further cuts to the budget. Some councillors indicated they had more recommendations to make, including a moratorium on attending conferences for both council and staff. A vote is not expected until at least one more budget meeting.

Despite significant cuts, especially to public works projects, some of the tax increase is likely due to an increase in garbage disposal costs and higher policing

costs, which were reviewed at the March 13 budget meeting.

Previously, Council had asked Essex Police Service to lower their budget increase from 8 per cent to about 3 per cent. This would have required a reduction of just over \$200,000. Council was advised, however, that only \$20,500 could be trimmed from the total police budget, which currently stands at about \$4.25 million.

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