

'Good for our community,' says Essex MP

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Donates hair for wigs

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Lack of discipline allows Canadiens back in series

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Free Press Photo / Daniel Schwab

RIGHT ON TARGET – Holy Name School Senior Kindergartener Andrew Leboeuf smacks principal David Lozinsky in the face with a cream pie last week during an assembly marking the end of a read-a-thon fundraising challenge. The students raised \$16,850.

\$2.5 million boost for Essex arena project

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

A new Essex arena is \$2.5 million closer to being built, after MPP Bruce Crozier announced the province's contribution to the project upon the release of the 2007 Ontario budget last week.

The lump sum will arrive shortly, said Crozier, the Essex MPP.

The project, which has been in the works for about two years, has been delayed by a lack of donations since the November municipal election.

Crozier said the town is not at risk of losing the funding if shovels aren't in the ground over the next year. However, he did say he is advising the town to use the money as quickly as possible.

"It's not intended to influence a decision," Crozier said, hinting at the ongoing debate about whether the project will be a single or twin-pad arena. "The real reason the funding is there is to help them hire people or buy equipment."

The money came from a \$70-million increase in the rural infrastructure fund, which was announced along with other budget highlights by Crozier, and Windsor MPPs Dwight Duncan and Sandra Pupatello in

Oldcastle Friday.

The budget addressed the fiscal deficit, anticipating a surplus of \$310 billion for 2006-07.

A \$38-billion investment in health care spending will help to shorten emergency room wait-times and hire new nurses, Pupatello said.

A \$780-million increase in education spending for a total of \$18 billion will go towards hiring 1,200 new elementary teachers, improving classrooms and providing for more OSAP funding and other grants, Duncan announced.

But the discontinuation of the Move Ontario Fund, which pumped more than \$2 million into Essex County for infrastructure spending, came as a disappointment to Warden Nelson Santos.

"Everything needs foundation and our infrastructure is certainly going to lead to greater investment in the area," Santos said after the budget announcements. "We're going to continue to push for that."

Last year's fund, which the province announced as one-time funding for all Ontario municipalities worth \$400 million, helped improve a number of local roads and bridges.

SEE LOCAL MPPS, PAGE 2

Paramedics continue protests until contract talks resume

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

Sun Parlour paramedics plan on picketing different locations throughout the county until their employers agree to come back to the negotiating table, a union representative said last week.

The employees, 34 full-time and 53 part-time, have been without a contract since March 2006. They are represented by the Services Employees International Union Local 1.ON.

Although provincial legislation prohibits the paramedics from going on strike, they have recently held information pickets at stations in Tecumseh and Leamington.

They have also refused

Code 1 assignments – low-priority patient transfers for doctors' appointments.

Ian Nash, paramedic and chief union steward, said paramedics are seeking retirement benefits, 3 per cent wage increases and maternal and paternal leave.

Currently, employees are offered retirement benefits up to age 65 and Nash says he'd like to see that increased to 75.

Additionally, with 55 per cent of paramedics being young women, many of them would like to have children but won't without maternal leave, Nash said.

SEE LOW PRIORITY, PAGE 6

Economic group plans 'brainstorming' summit

BY ANDY COMBER

Members of a newly formed economic group presented an update on their progress in creating an economic and tourism strategy for the municipality at the regular meeting of Essex Town Council, March 19.

"We are holding a strategic planning session to put together some key ideas," said Bill Baker, president of the Shores of Essex Resource Corporation (SOERC), speaking of the not-for-profit organization's plan to hold an economic summit at the end of April.

The summit is expected to include about 250 people representing the business sector and community at large, said Baker, a

Colchester South resident with an extensive background in business and market development, who was joined by a number of directors from SOERC in making the update.

"It is going to be a brainstorming session, to get the stakeholders interacting," said Paul Foster, an Essex accountant and SOERC director from Ward 1, speaking of the planned meeting.

"We're going to be breaking down the barriers to focus as a region," said Foster, indicating the need to bring the municipality together to work in partnership.

SEE DIVERSIFICATION, PAGE 7

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