

English-only bid given the boot

By STEVE HOUSTON
Staff Reporter

The town of Markham has refused to lock the door on a provincial plan to extend French language services in the municipality.

Instead, it has vowed to continue recognizing the multilingual character of the town and won't declare itself a one-language community.

The declaration from members came Tuesday evening after a presentation from David Leitch, national president of the Alliance for the Preservation of English in Canada (APEC).

Mr. Leitch, a Thornhill resident, asked the town for a vote to repeal Bill 8 and to request a referendum on the government's French language services bill in Ontario.

He said the bill, which was passed in the Ontario legislature last year, offers special status to French-speaking Ontario residents.

He pointed to 1981 census figures that show only 480 Markham residents speak French at home.

He also claimed there is evidence of discrimination against English-speaking people in the hiring of civil servants, and said the move to extend French services would be supported with tax dollars.

"It is the contention of APEC that this act is the opening move to designate Ontario an officially bilingual province," he said to Council.

But his claim that there is an "artificial need" for French language services in Canada was protested by town officials.

And Regional Councillor Ron Moran noted that any decision by the town would take much consideration.

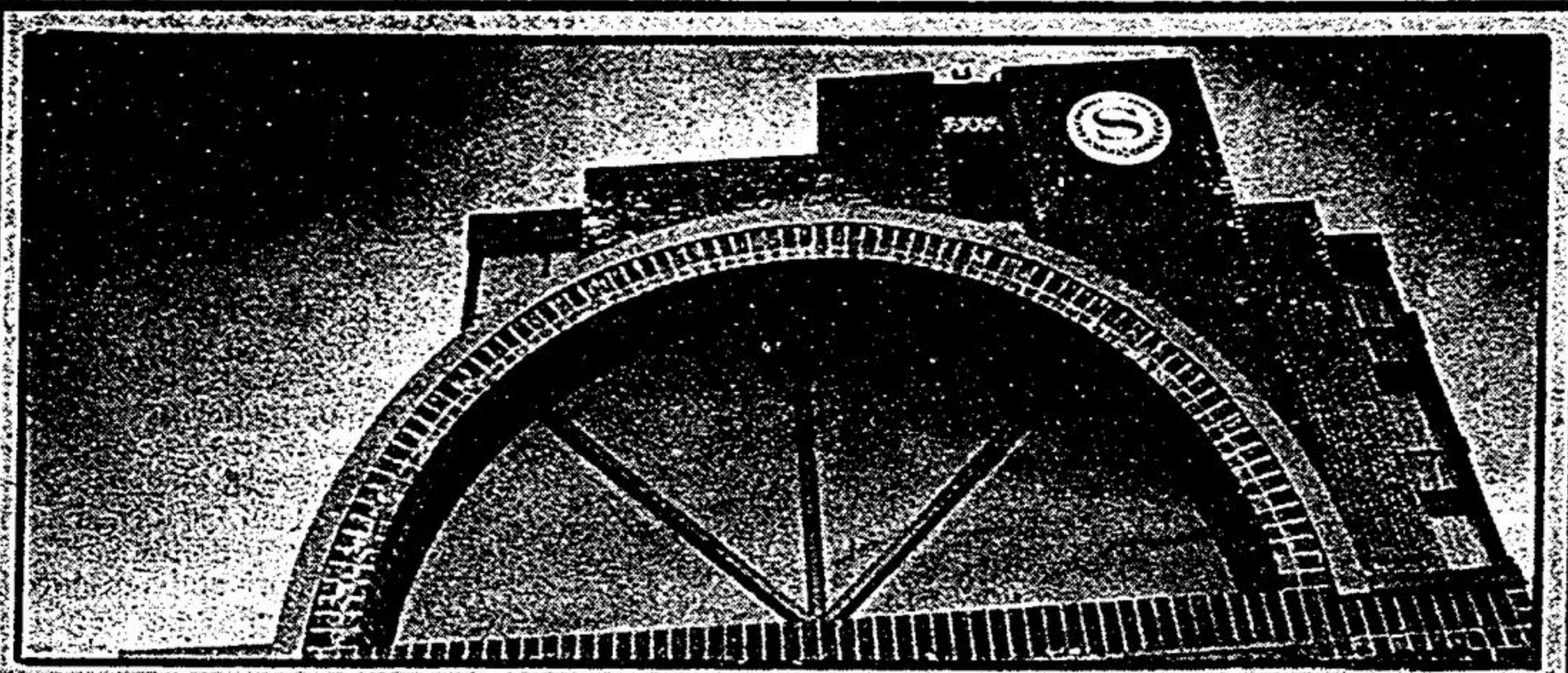
Markham Councillor Tom Newall told Mr. Leitch that all municipalities in Ontario should recognize Canada's second official language.

"We in Ontario have a responsibility to come to terms with those communities where there is a sizable French-speaking community," he said.

And Markham's recognized multi-cultural character prompted Thornhill Councillor Doreen Quirk to comment that Mr. Leitch's request for unilingualism didn't "belong in this council chamber."

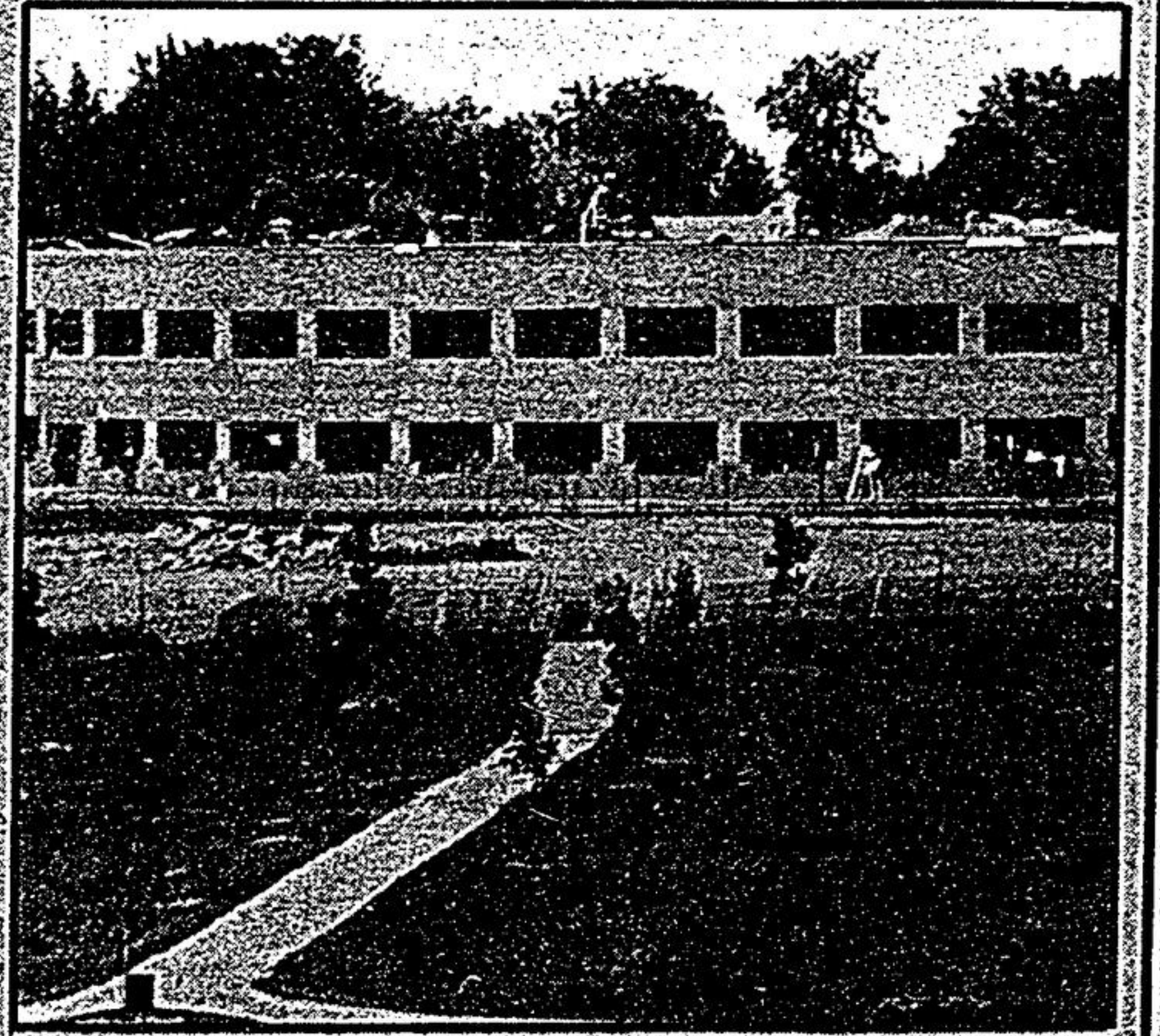
She also questioned whether "language police" would be employed to enforce an English-only standard should a unilingual status be chosen for the town.

"To declare this town a totally unilingual town... would be improper and impractical," she concluded.



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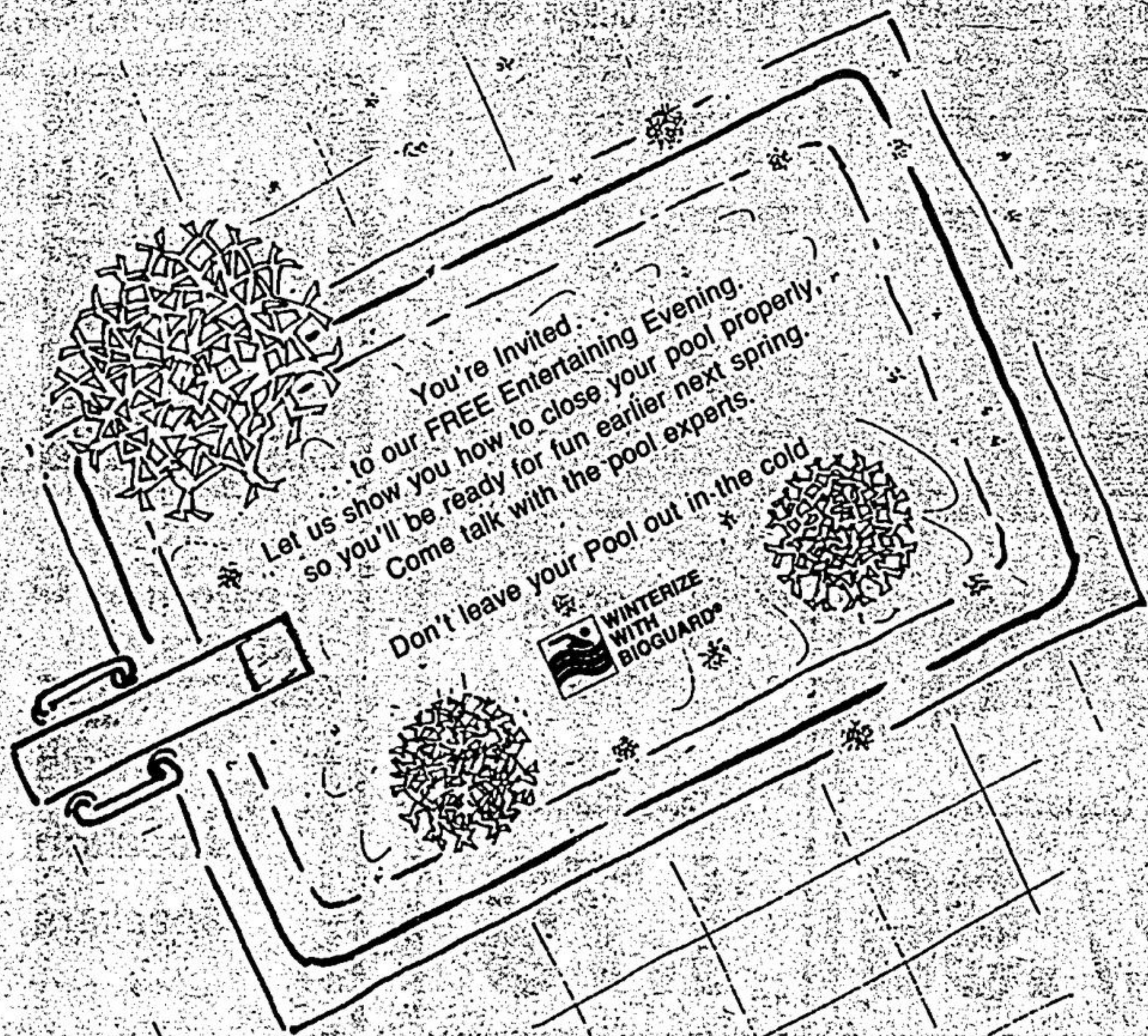
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