

Third world aid

'Neighbors' helping out

Almost every Canadian has clean water at the turn of a tap. Yet each year in the world's poor countries over 25 million people (about the population of Canada) die from diseases spread by their water supply. Most of the victims are children.

Now a group of Markham and Stouffville area residents wants to do something for those people. Global Neighbors, a program of Hagerman Mennonite Church, is proposing that all residents who wish to improve the water supply in the Third World donate a sum of money when they send their own water payment to the municipality. A delegation will be presented the proposal to the town council of Whitchurch-Stouffville last night.

The idea is not new. It began in England, then in 1986 spread to Canada. By 1989, more than 34 municipalities in this country had participated, including Calgary, Winnipeg, Halifax, London, Kingston, Guelph, East York and Toronto.

Here's how it works: The non-profit agency WaterCan, based in Ottawa, provides small leaflets that explain the program. If the towns of Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville agree,

they will send one leaflet along with each water bill.

Then, as residents pay their bills, they can simply put another cheque in the same envelope to help provide clean water worldwide.

There is no extra work for the municipality, except to forward the cheques to WaterCan.

The federal government, though, is heavily involved. Through its agency CIDA, it matches each dollar contributed with at least two more, trebling the value of WaterCan donations. Thus \$10 becomes \$30, \$25 becomes \$75 and \$100 becomes \$300. In addition, donations are deductible.

WaterCan then channels these funds into reliable existing agencies such as Oxfam, CUSO and the Canadian Hunger Foundation, which plan and execute the projects.

So far, WaterCan has raised

money for clean water in more than a dozen countries. For example, in 1988 ten new wells in 10 villages provided water to more than 10,800 Sri Lankans. This year a new well in Ethiopia will yield water for 2,200 orphaned and abandoned children in a vocational training centre, as well as 5,000 villagers.

One current project in Kenya epitomizes the low-cost "appropriate" technology favored by WaterCan: water will be drawn from the new wells by hand pumps.

Women, as well as children,

gain from water projects, for it is women who have traditionally consumed their energies in fetching water over long distances.

Global Neighbors hopes that municipal councillors will support the plan so that the towns of Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville can join the list of Canadian municipalities that are working for clean water in poor countries.

When Canadians' own supply of fresh water is the largest in the world, what could make more sense than helping others to improve their supply?

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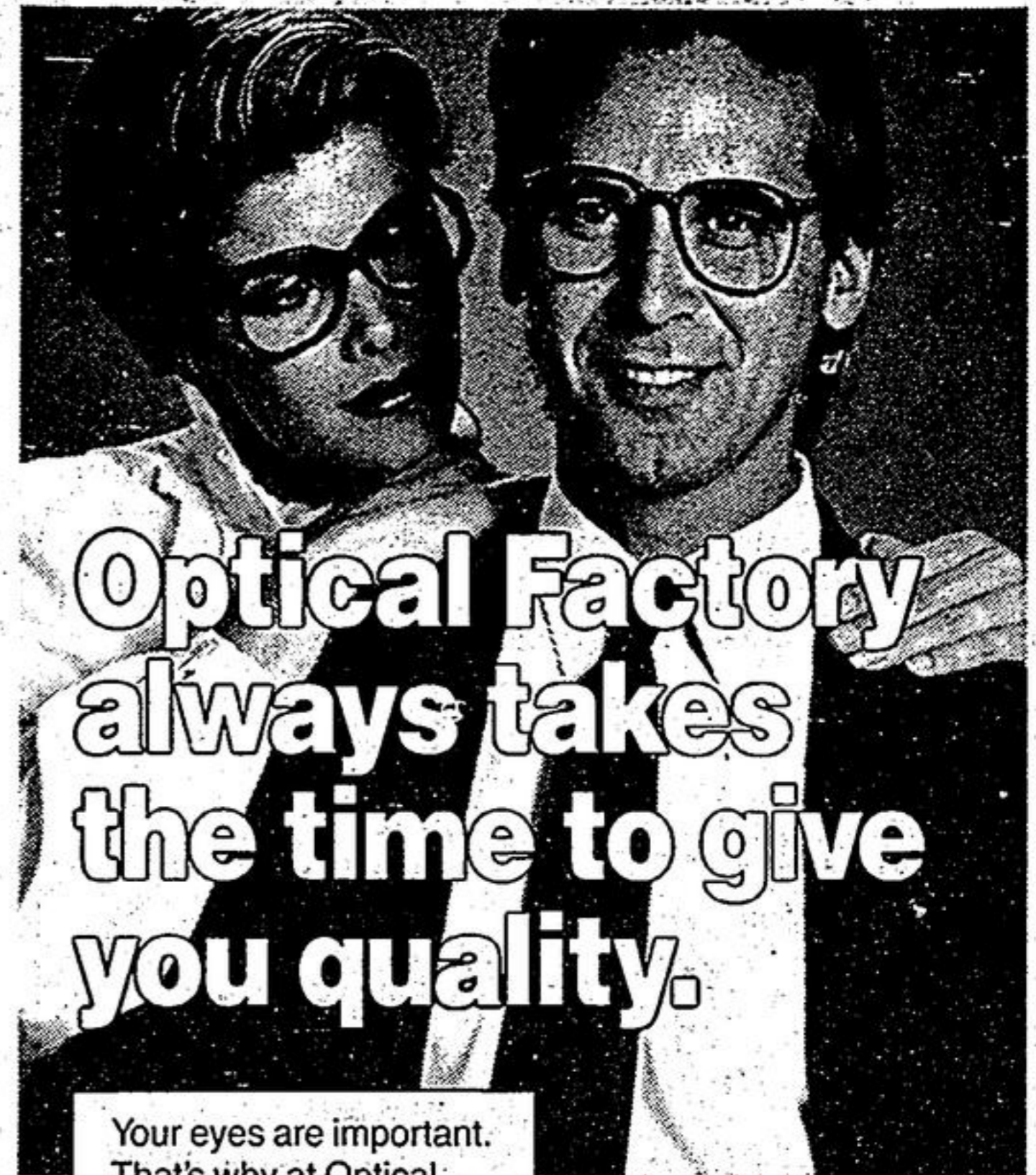
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