

Pay equity hike threatens Red Cross homemaker service in York Region

A pay equity-driven wage hike may shut down the Red Cross' homemaker agency, the largest and oldest homemakers' group in York Region, its manager said yesterday.

Ontario's pay equity law will raise hourly salaries for 162 homemakers — and their 6,200 Ontario colleagues — by 45 per cent on Jan. 1, Jess McDonald said. "It will basically put us under," she said. "We'll have to close; there's no doubts about it."

McDonald said the homemakers are paid at least \$10 an hour, and average \$13 to \$14, including benefits. The service also has 10 staff at its York Region office.

That average salary will rise to

\$17 or \$18 an hour because of the 1988 law, but the agency's smaller competitors can continue to make slower adjustments, say Red Cross officials.

"We have a requirement that will literally force us out of the business" because the Red Cross had male employees in comparable jobs in 1988, and other homemaker services did not, the officials. These competitors were offered a different way of reaching pay equity, said Allen Prowse, general manager of Red Cross field operations in Ontario.

Before the year ends, the Red Cross wants provincial politicians to adjust the law, putting the agency in the same category as the others,

said Prowse.

In the meantime, the service will keep running as usual — 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, McDonald promised. "I feel personally that we will survive this," she added.

More people are being nursed at home, away from hospitals and other institutions, said McDonald. Homemakers, who prepare meals, bathe and dress patients, have started doing many tasks nurses used to do for clients. "Sometimes the only person they see is the homemaker," she added. And a more competitive system of bidding the province plans to introduce in 1999 may drive homemaker wages down, said McDonald.

— Mike Adler

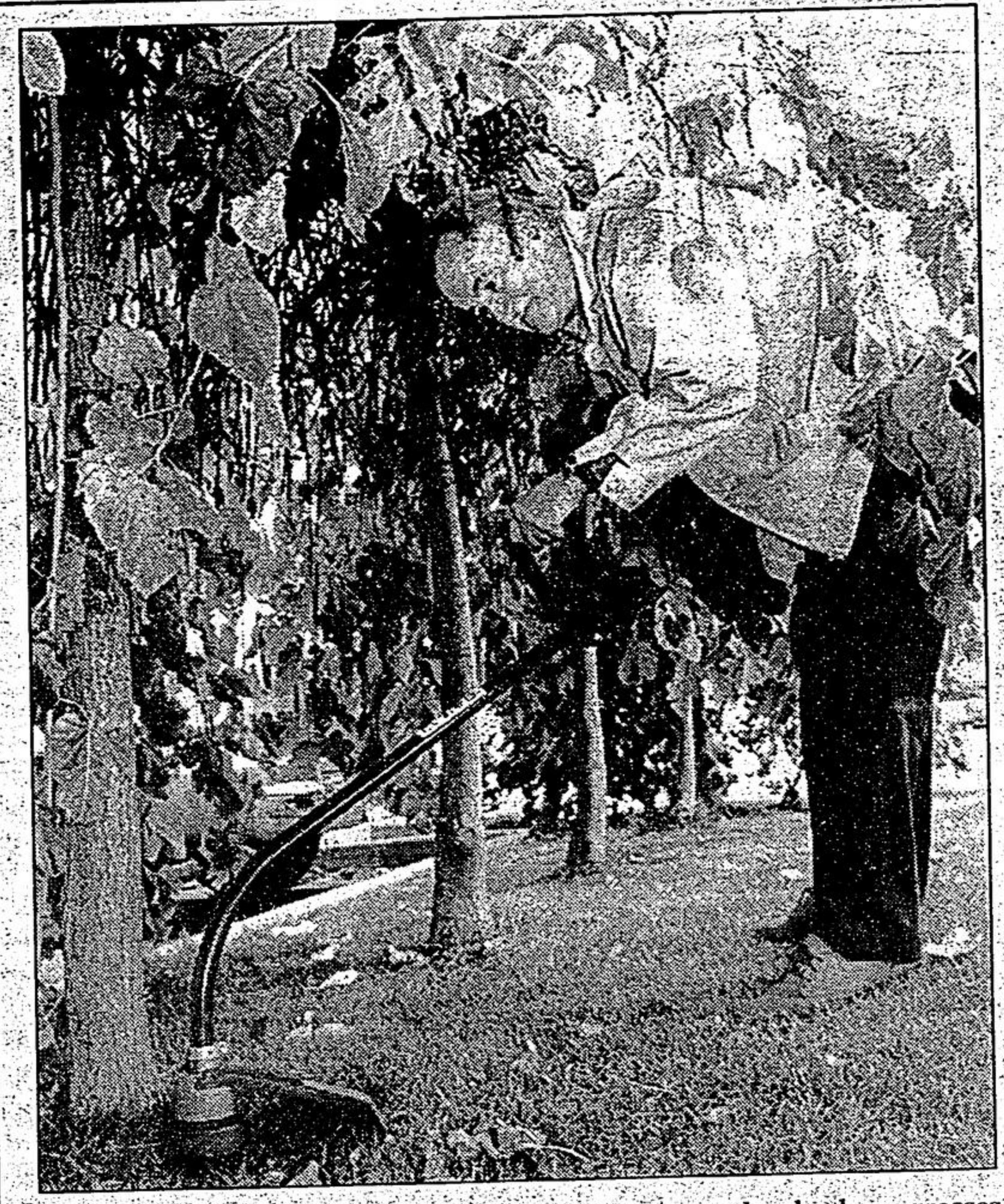


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WACKY KIND OF GUY: Bill Montgomery attacks the long grasses gathered under this grove of umbrella trees on Main Street.


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Plan gets green light

A 57-home development slated for Ballantrae got the green light Tuesday. The plan includes a parcel of land to be designated for a new fire hall. Council has agreed to let Savoia Development Ltd. and its owner Joe Zappone proceed with building the single-family homes on 92 acres on the west side of Highway 48, north of Aurora Road.

Depending on the will of the new council to be elected on Nov. 10, it's expected that money for the new fire hall will be included on the next capital budget.



DUNKELD

Town officials, including Fire Chief Bill Brown have long expressed a need for a new fire hall for the north. As well the majority of this councillors have been ready to okay the fire hall. Ward 4 councillor Cliff Dunkeld said he'd like to see the fire hall built as soon as possible. "We might see it up in '98," said Dunkeld.

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