

MP doubtful bank merger beneficial

MIKE ADLER
Staff Reporter

Oak Ridges MP Bryon Wilfert wants to see a lot of questions answered before the Chretien government makes its decision on the merger of two of Canada's biggest banks.

The Royal Bank and the Bank of Montreal announced their intentions last week, saying they need to merge to compete with larger, international banks.

Finance Minister Paul Martin has said he will wait for the report of a federal task force on bank-

ing, expected in September, before taking action.

Wiefert, a Liberal MP representing Stouffville and Markham's north end, said he's worried only bank shareholders will benefit from a merger.

"I am concerned that the public interest will not be well served by this proposal," he said in a release yesterday, citing possible job losses and the merger's effect on bank branches in smaller communities.

The government will not be pushed into a quick decision, Wilfert promised.

"The closing of branches means the loss of jobs, the

loss of access of all Canadians. I am not going to voice support for any merger that will not benefit the consumer," he pledged.

Markham MP Jim Jones said his Conservative Party supports the bank's request, although it shares the same concerns listed by Wilfert.

"There is a consensus that this merger will ultimately go through and by deliberately postponing it we're not doing anybody any service," Jones said yesterday. "The banks need the clout to be competitive in the international markets."



FEBRUARY IS THE MONTH The annual Heart & Stroke campaign lifts off in Stouffville. L to R: Doris Harvey, Les Clarke, Wayne Emmerson (mayor), Sheila McNeil and Mary Hamerston. All these people surrounding the mayor are canvassing captains and volunteers for the Heart & Stroke.

Photo by STEVE SOMERVILLE

'Crucial' sentence delayed for 15th time

JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Reporter

A Musselman Lake mother was left feeling very discouraged on Friday after a Newmarket judge delayed sentencing a man found to be responsible for the death of her teenaged daughter.

The judge told the court, including Jennifer Cook, her parents and other family members that he needed more time before sentencing Tonino Iafrate, 23, of Downsview.

In November, Iafrate pleaded guilty to criminal negligence causing death in connection with an August '96 accident on the Ninth Line that claimed the life of 16-year-old Darlene O'Brien.

Iafrate was the driver of the car, while the Stouffville District High School student was the lone passenger.

Before going to court on Friday, Cook visited Darlene's grave. It was a special day—I was Darlene's 18th birthday.

Cook views the sentencing as crucial. She hopes it gives her some closure, allowing her to go on to the next stage in the grieving process. The case has gone towards the court about 15 times, making it especially difficult on all parties involved, especially Darlene's mother.



Flowers lay at the grave site of Jennifer Cook's daughter, Darlene O'Brien, who was killed two years ago. The flowers were laid to celebrate what would have been Darlene's 18th birthday. Photo by STEVE SOMERVILLE

Chief wants only to 'better serve'

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Molyneux, Newmarket fire chief and regional fire services coordinator. "If it's my family that needs assistance, I want the closest assistance available," he said.

But Stouffville's fire chief, Bill Brown, said the town has made such arrangements "under another name" for years. For example, he said, Aurora's department has a contract for the Vandorf area.

"If a fire comes in there, we're

going to send Aurora," Brown said. "If they need more help, then yes, they will call us." Centralized training means we should be able to work together better," continued Brown, but added his volunteer firefighters only have so many hours to spend.

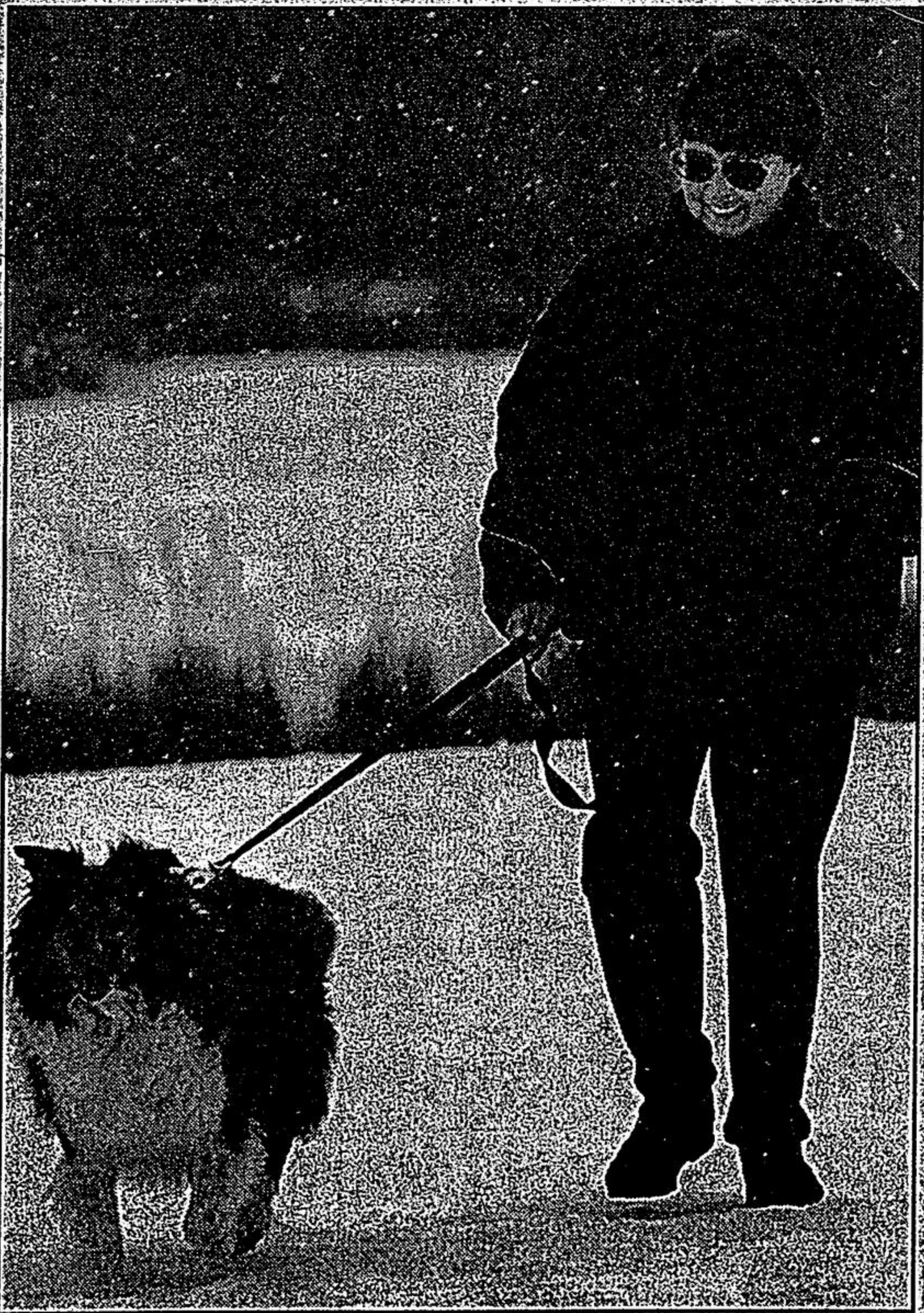
He said a central dispatch—replacing four separate dispatchers in the region—must be the first step.

"The bottom line is: How can we best serve our people?" Brown concluded.

Local councils still have to agree to the plan, so the results could be different.

Markham Mayor Don Cousens said the right answer may not be amalgamation. "It may be better coordination of services. It may be other options in between," he said.

The regional politicians also agreed people should get permits for plumbing or septic tanks from the same municipality, issuing them a building permit, instead of from the region.



JUST ME AND MY DOG: Pat van der Voort walks Prince on the Stouffville Reservoir trails on Thursday afternoon during a bit of a snowstorm.

Photo by SYOERD WITTEVEEN

Library board selected

The new members of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Library Board were to be selected at a regular council meeting last night.

Although the board shrank from nine to seven members, the town has been bombarded with applications to the library board, local Mayor Wayne

Emmerson said. Council's appointees on the board are Ward 2 Councillor Mark Carroll, Ward 5 Councillor Judy Scala and Ward 6 Councillor Sue Sherban. The town is now inviting applications to the local environment committee, while other boards and committees were picked 10 days ago.