



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Alexandra Lieb was a civil engineer in her native Colombia. But now that she has arrived in Canada, she's been told to upgrade her education to meet standards in this country. In the meantime, she will take any job she can find.

IMMIGRANTS HAVE MORE SKILLS THAN A TYPICAL CANADIAN, BUT RECEIVE FEWER EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

In search of a decent job

BY PATRICK CASEY
Staff Writer

Alexandra Lieb waited tables at Swiss Chalet. For a while, she did the same routine task day after day, on a Magna assembly line. A single mother with two children, Lieb says she has to do whatever's necessary to put food on the table. She has 5-1/2 years of post-secondary education and degrees in manufacturing and civil engineering that led to vast experience in pollution and quality control in her native Colombia. When Lieb arrived in Canada in 1993, she discovered all that hard work wouldn't pay off — her academic and work credentials were considered unacceptable for work as an engineer in this country. Lieb has spent six years studying high school English courses and has enrolled in quality assurance classes at two colleges. She also needs to complete nine exams to be registered as an industrial engineer in Ontario — a costly endeavour for a struggling single mom. "There are a lot of good, educated people that come to this country and want to work, but I have to put food on the table for my kids," said Lieb. "I don't want a job where I

can't move forward and you have to feel good about yourself when you are working. I have been through a lot of interviews, but I'm told my resume is too good for the position. I just want a decent job." Lieb is one of countless individuals to experience a cycle that begins after a six-month wait for landed immigrant status in Canada. Together with the University of Toronto, the York, South Simcoe Training & Adjustment Board has completed a research survey on foreign-trained professionals and skilled workers residing in York Region and Bradford West Gwillimbury. Many newcomers work below the level of training they received in their native countries. According to the survey, 2,800 newcomers were working as entry-level sales and service clerks, when only 350 people had identified those jobs as consistent with their experience and training. And only half of the 2,800 skilled trade occupants were employed in their chosen field. "We know employers are looking for skilled labour, but our findings show there is a gap," said training board executive director Tom McNeil, who organized a day-long forum and workshop at Richmond Hill's Sheraton Parkway Hotel last Thursday to discuss the study.

Last month, the province took a big step toward helping qualified immigrants find jobs with the creation of a service to assess academic credentials of immigrant job seekers. With 66 per cent of working age immigrants with some post-secondary education or training, World Education Services will provide employers with foreign credentials to compare against Ontario standards. "If employers in this country cannot get access to the labourers they need, they will not stay in Canada. That point is very clear," said McNeil. "Employers will not expand into York Region without these employees." University of Toronto professor Dr. Edward Harvey authored the study and determined the typical immigrant, in fact, has more qualifications than the average Canadian, yet don't receive the same type of opportunities. "This is a general problem for all immigrants, but especially for visible minorities. We have problems relating to social and economic disadvantages," said Harvey, noting 70 per cent of all Canadian immigrants are visible minorities. "We have a real problem preparing people for practical skills for the labour market. We spend more on education than any other country,

but I believe we get the least amount back. We still need a better understanding of what the problems are, as we work toward the solutions." Because of retirement and disinterest from graduating high school students, a shortage of certified trade personnel is expected to hit the electrical and contracting industry over the next several years. Martin McBride insists it's easier to fill the gap with certified workers from other countries. "We get recruits for apprentices right around the world, but we have a hard time finding the pathway to certification. They need a fast track," said McBride, director of apprenticeship training for the Electrical and Construction Maintenance Industry of Toronto. "You couldn't ask for anything better than a Russian or Polish tradesperson. But they can't go to school for one or two years learning the technical language. They have families to support and the apprenticeship is too long. If they already have the skills, let's allow them to convert those skills to North American standards. "When employees from mixed groups work with each other, they will pick things up quicker."

REGIONAL News Digest



WHAT'S HAPPENING

Antique Show & Sale
April 15, 16, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
at Richmond Green, Richmond Hill
1300 Elgin Rd. E.

Bill Riordan is just one of the many local dealers who will display antiques, such as this doll and clock, during the 21st annual Antique Show & Sale for Family and Credit Counselling Services.

Crystal ball funds ER

The Markham Stouffville Hospital Foundation hosts its annual gala dinner this Friday, with the money raised helping purchase a patient-monitoring system for the emergency department.

The celebration, at Le Parc Banquet Facilities in Richmond Hill, will commemorate the hospital's 10th anniversary with a crystal ball theme.

Entertainment will be provided by the The Paul Crosney Orchestra and Word of Mouth, as well as a surprise appearance by an international entertainer. Master of ceremonies duties will be carried out by Ken Shaw, national editor of CFTO.

Last year's event raised \$201,000 for capital equipment for the hospital. This year, with more than 900 guests expected at the sold-out gala, the goal is to raise \$225,000.

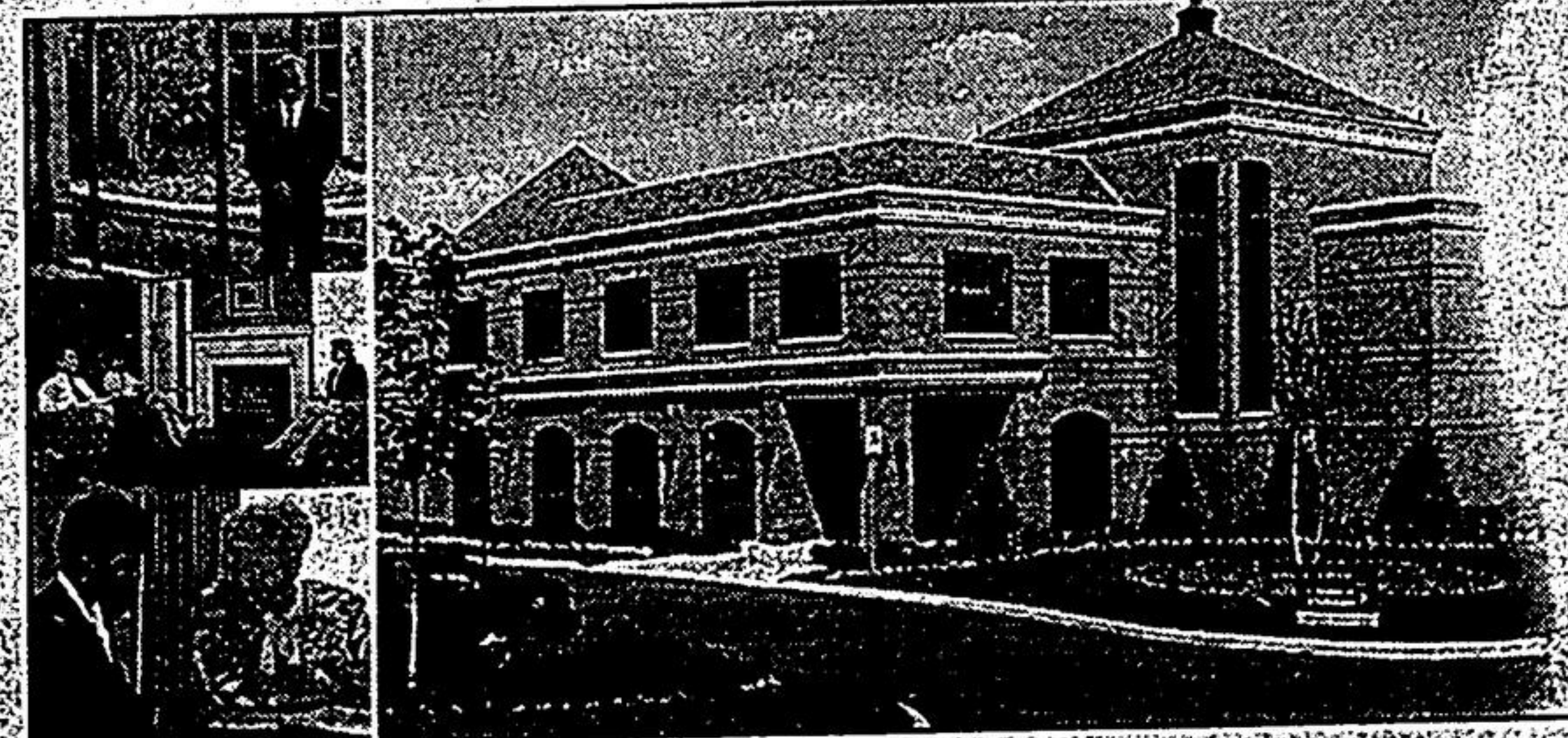
Highlights include a champagne reception, silent auction, raffle tickets, fortune tellers and special entertainment.

New tractor for Stouffville

Taxpayers in Whitchurch-Stouffville are about to buy a new tractor.

Today, Whitchurch-Stouffville council is expected to give the green light to the community and leisure services department to replace its 32-year-old tractor with a new one, valued at between \$28,000 and \$32,000.

The old tractor continuously breaks down, staff reported.



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