

Transit delay angers Scarpitti

BY PATRICK CASEY
Staff Writer

Although York Region's transit systems amalgamated Jan. 1, riders will have to wait until at least September for seamless east-west service.

That has Markham Regional Councillor Frank Scarpitti angry. "We should have a seamless service across Hwy. 7 between Markham and Vaughan and a seamless service across 16th Avenue," Scarpitti said.

"There is no reason why we can't do that in the immediate future. We have staff and consultants and there's no reason why we can't have a bus across 16th Avenue that goes to Canada's Wonderland for work or play.

"I realize there's a five-year plan but I don't see this as a major change in our service," he said.

At a meeting Thursday, councillors learned the new regional transit department won't make any major changes in service until Toronto-based consultant IBI Group has finished its comprehensive business plan this fall.

IBI will receive \$93,000 to conduct an overview of York

Region Transit's current operations and will provide a service strategy for both conventional and specialized transit services across the region.

The merging of York's five local transit systems and seven specialized services created Ontario's fourth-largest transit operation.

Eventually, the new department will allow riders to travel across the region without transferring or paying additional fares.

Transit department general manager Don Gordon said it's worth waiting for the business plan before changing the system.

"I don't think September is too long to wait," Gordon said. "The planning process can be protracted. It's not done overnight.

"We are looking at interim things immediately and we will put them in place.

"It's terrific there are lofty expectations but we are not going to do it in the absence of good service planning."

He pointed to last week's decision to extend specialized transit service for the disabled to East Gwillimbury and King City as a step in the right direction.

The five-year study will explore tapping into new transit markets, removing barriers to travel between York Region and Toronto and an integrated fare system that also includes GO Transit services within the regional system.

Last year, 7.1 million passengers rode municipal transit buses, but that accounted for less than 8 per cent of all commuter trips.

And with 25 per cent of York Region roads already at capacity, the transit department has set a goal of reaching 33-per-cent ridership by 2021.

"We can't piecemeal the plan," said Newmarket Regional Councillor Diane Humeniuk, chairperson of the transit committee.

"Each community addresses needs that they all believe are extremely important. We have to do things that are good for the entire region."

The transit department has also approved \$99,000 for Interkom Creative Marketing to create a marketing and communications program for the new initiative.

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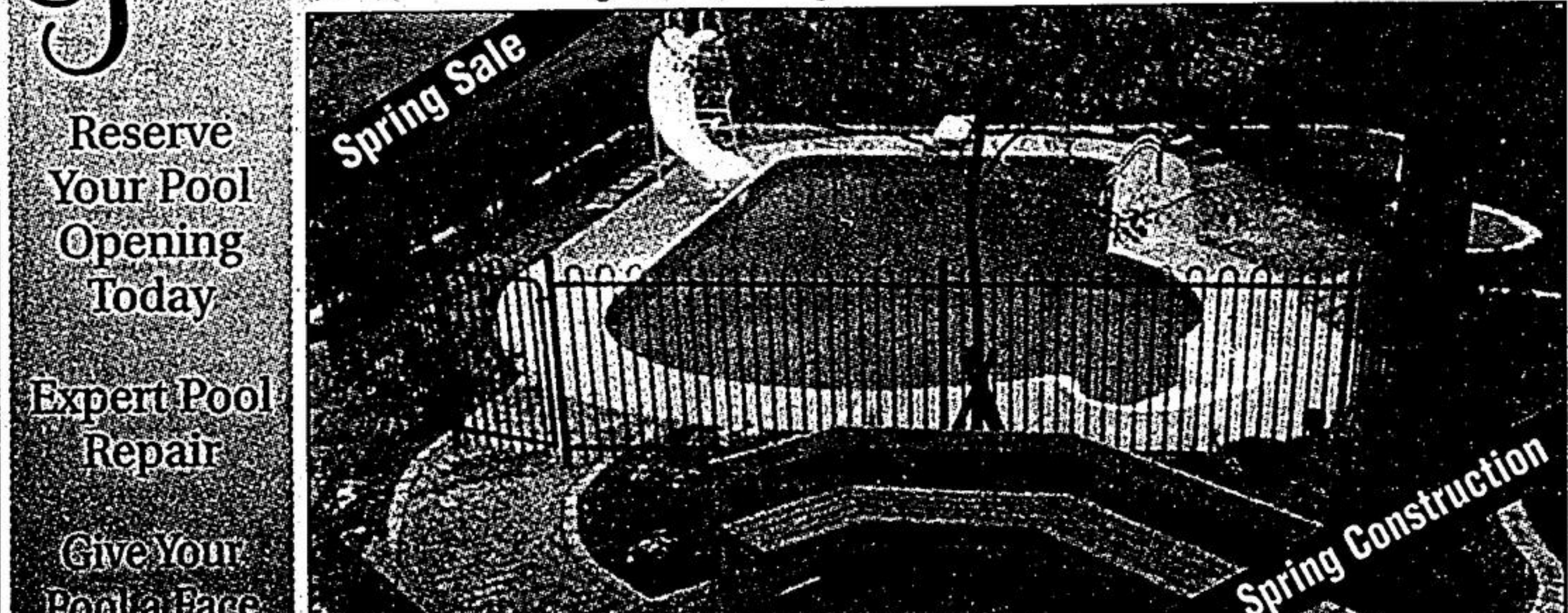
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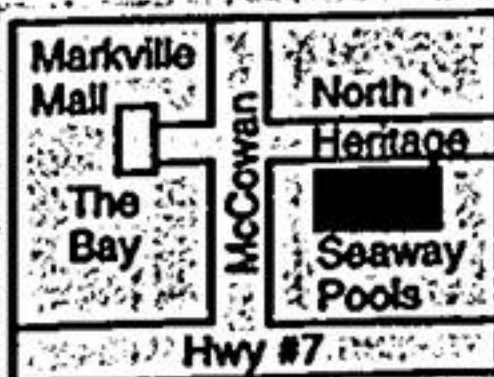
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