Newcomers to York Region will strain public services

BY JEFF MITCHELL
Staff Writer

York Region's growing population will require a greater commitment to human services, from health care to public transit to affordable housing, politicians have been told.

An effort has been launched to ensure governments, care providers and social agencies work together to address those challenges, representatives of York's Human Services Planning coalition told councillors last Thursday.

"In the next five years, 125,000 people will be moving to York Region," said Bill Hogarth, director with the York Region District School Board.

He said that influx of new residents will place a strain on existing services, "that are currently underfunded".

Susan Taylor, director of human services planning with the region, said the coalition, which is made up of representatives from across the spectrum of social services, aims to create a co-operative and cohesive strategy for the future.

"The coalition realizes it has a big challenge ahead of it," Ms Taylor said.

So far, the group has succeeded in establishing community dialogue on issues and has secured federal funding for an effort to attract human services workers to York Region, Ms Taylor said.

That sort of work will continue, with the coalition enlisting the help of the region's municipalities to identify needs and address them, she said.

"Area municipalities are important partners in human services planning," Ms Taylor said.

The coalition predicts an increasing demand for services, even over the course of the next five years. Of the 125,000 new residents expected to settle in York during that period, it is estimated:

- 22,000 will require spaces in the region's public and separate schools;
- 41,666 will use a service funded by the United Way;
- 10,000 will use public transit;
- 2,200 will require a licensed child-care space;
- 31,250 will need affordable housing;
- 3,125 will use a mental health service;
- 7,987 will require an acute care hospital bed; and,
- 2,625 will need in-home Community Care Access Centre services.

That's a daunting list of statistics, but one that is being addressed through the current effort, said Vaughan Councillor Joyce Frustaglio.

"The work of this coalition is spreading like wildfire in the GTA and beyond," she said.

The effort is being benefitted by the diverse and energetic mix of representatives — from sectors such as education, policing, health care, social services, affordable housing, seniors issues, churches and municipal government — taking part, Ms Frustaglio said.

"Not only are they dynamic, they are keenly interested," she said.

Research into a cause and cure for schizophrenia is vastly underfunded.
Schizophrenia Society of Ontario
1-800-449-6367 - www.web.net/~sso
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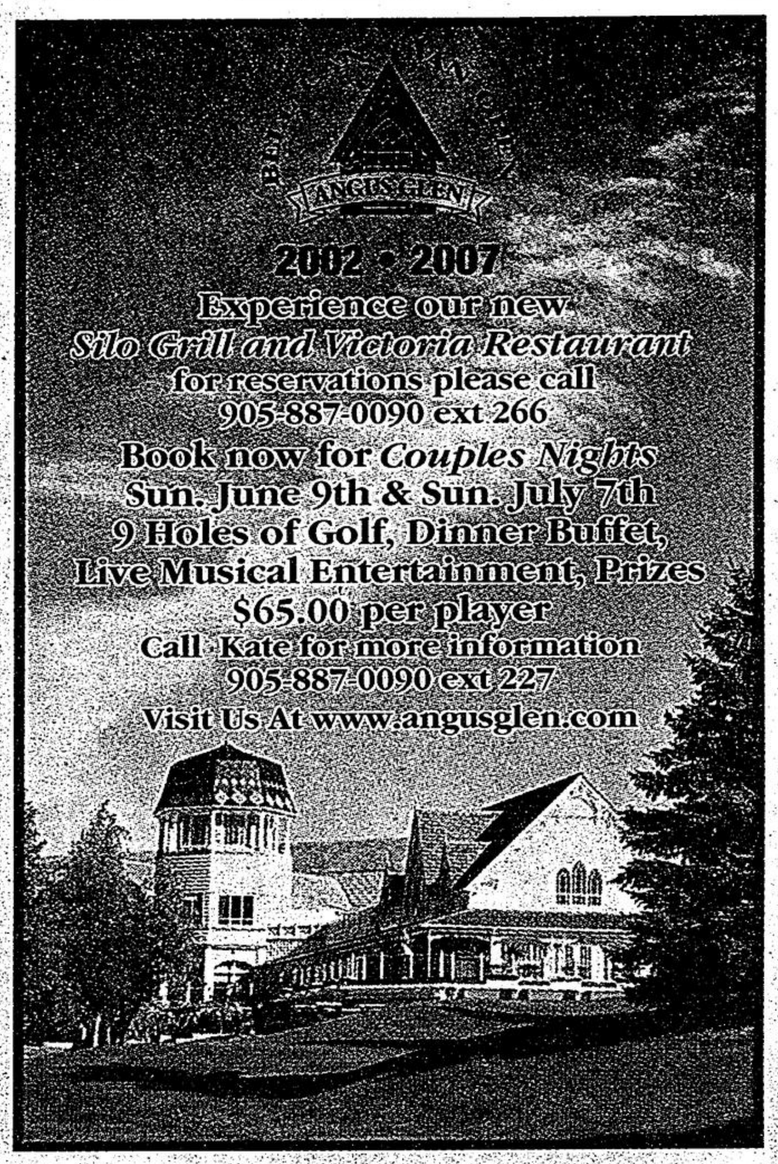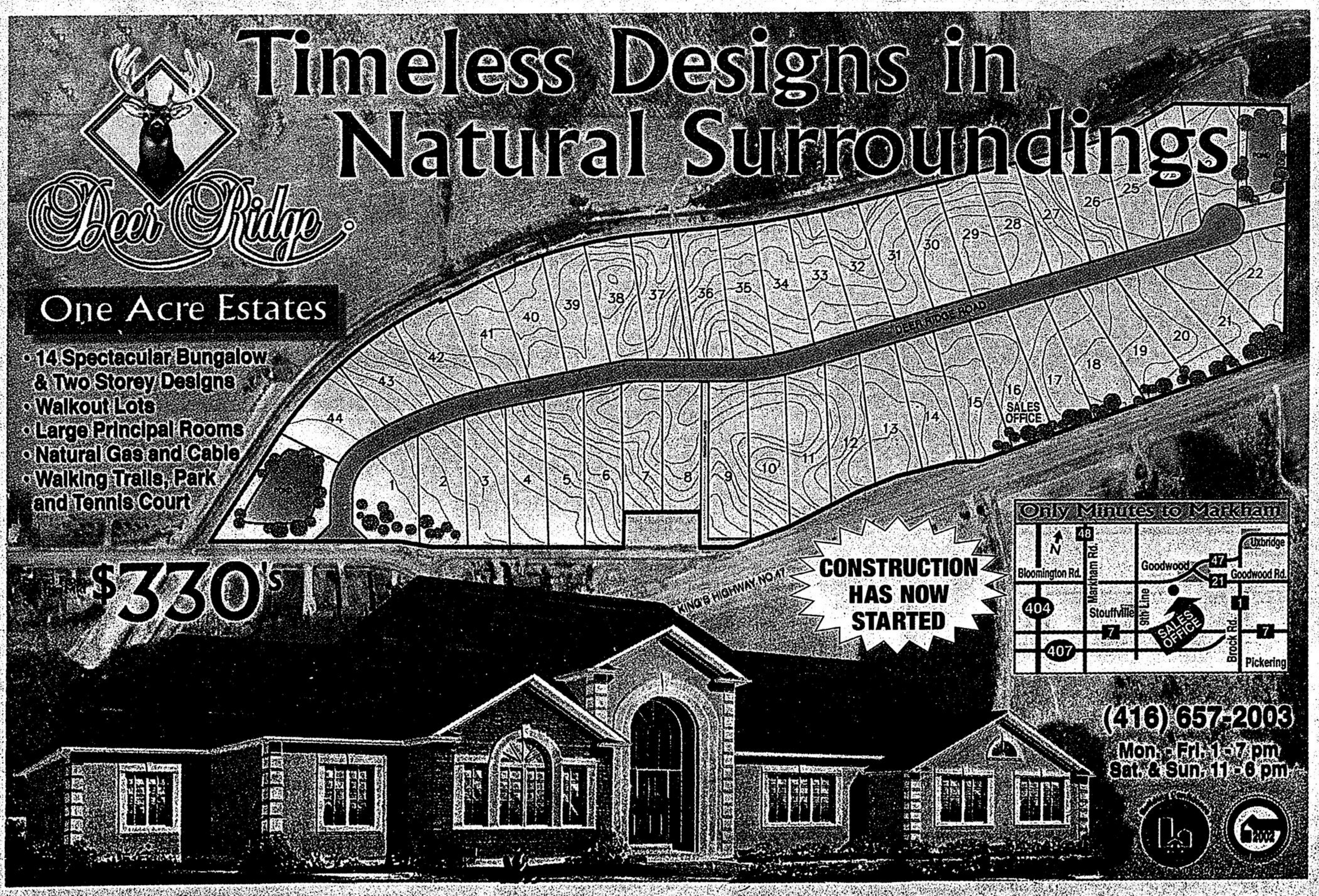
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