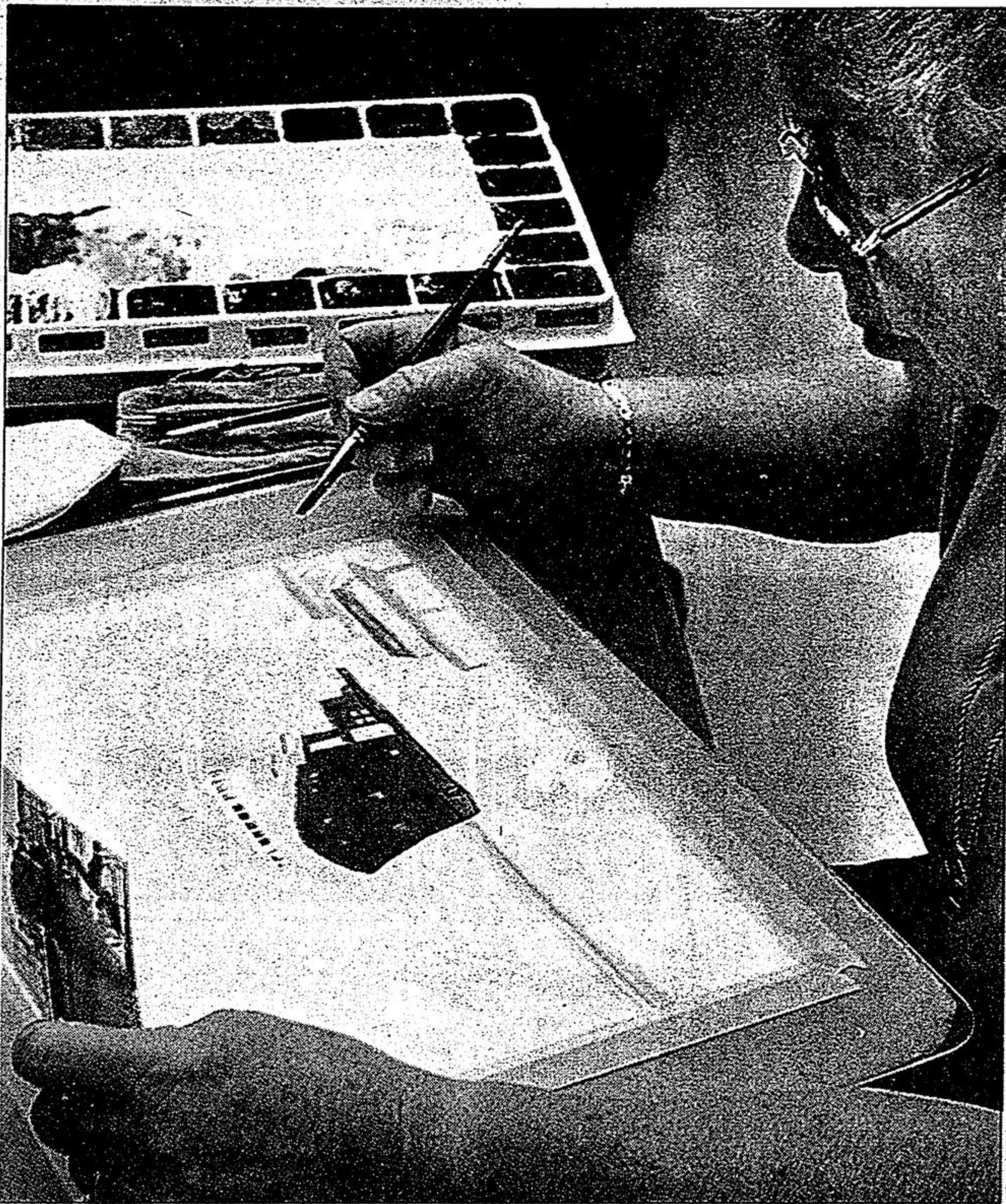
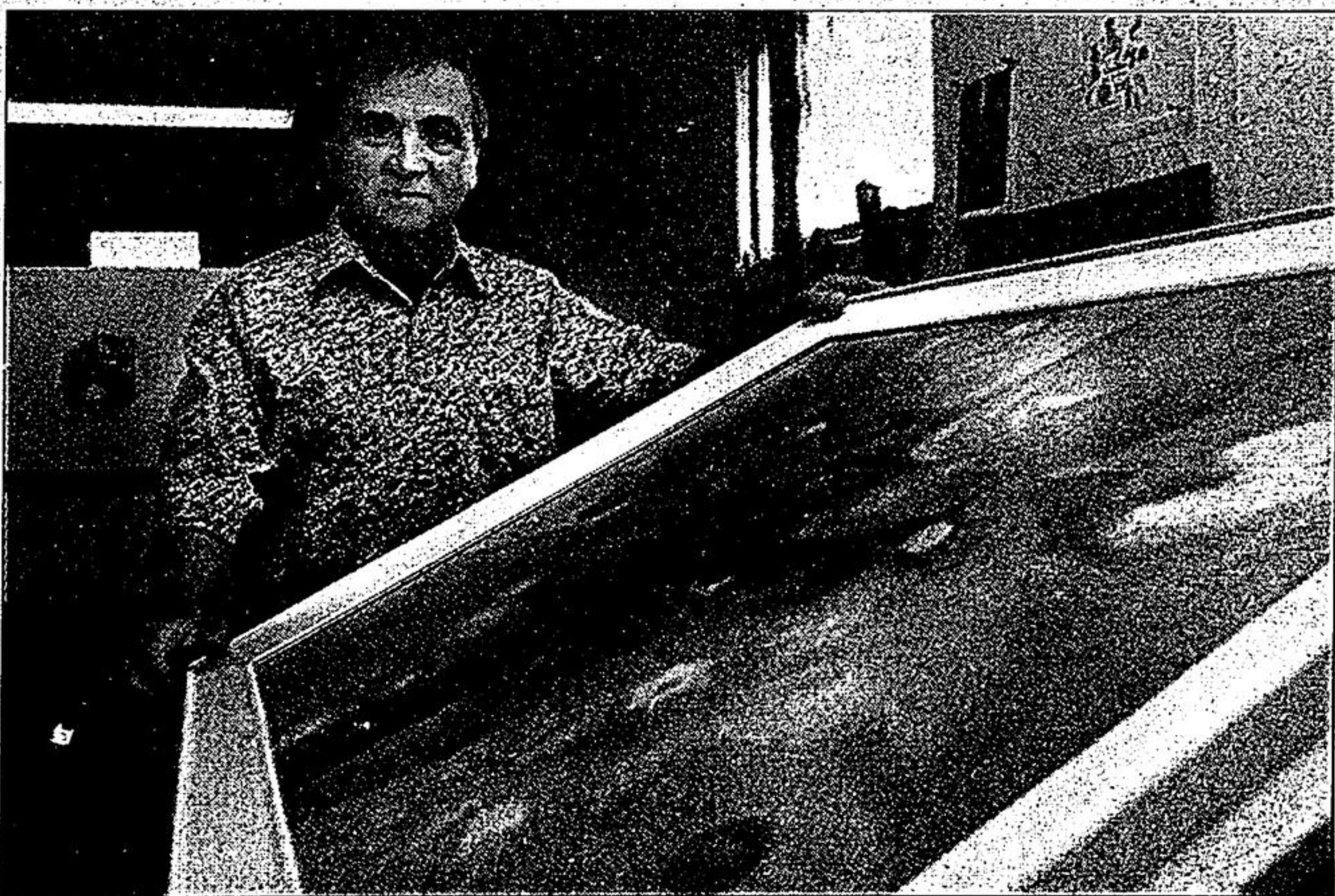


SHOWING THEIR ARTISTIC SIDE



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Mary Foord, member of the Palettes of Whitchurch, works on a painting of Midland Harbour as she and other members prepare for the Thanksgiving Weekend art show/sale at the Lemonville Community Centre on McCowan Road south of Bloomington Road.



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Stouffville artist Tony Volpe, seen here with his painting Springtime, has his work on display at the Kathleen Gormley McKay Art Gallery on Main Street, Unionville. Mr. Volpe is in attendance during a reception between 1 and 5 p.m. today.

Preventable blindness a 'staggering' problem

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Reporter

The numbers are staggering — 45 million blind people worldwide now and by 2020 that number could reach 75 million.

About 50 people gathered on Thursday as officials of the Christian Blind Mission International (CBMI) of Whitchurch-Stouffville joined global health organizations and world coalitions against blindness to declare Oct. 10 World Sight Day, and to introduce Vision 2020.

The ceremony included Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Wayne Emmerson and town councillors Peter Dobrich and Cliff Dunkeld.

The year 2002 has been declared the year to conquer avoidable blindness around the world.

"World Sight Day is the one day of the year that we ask people to pause and think not only about their own vision but also about the eyesight of those less fortunate than themselves," said David McComiskey, national director of the Stouffville Road mission.

"There are more than 45 million blind people in the world and another 135 million who are severely visually impaired," said Mr. McComiskey.

"World Sight Day not only helps to focus our attention on this terrible and escalating problem, but also helps us to think we can responsibly change this unacceptable situation."

The CBMI director reminded the audience that one only needs to travel to India or Uganda to be confronted by the problem of blindness in developing countries.

"It is a sad fact that 90 per cent of the world's blind and severely visually impaired people live in developing countries.

"Blind beggars, including children, still confront you on the streets of Chennai and Kampala."

Vision 2020 officials are calling for support from gov-



CLIFF DUNKELD: Local residents know the good work done by Christian Blind Mission.

ernments, health care workers, private corporations and the public to raise money to eradicate needless blindness.

Trachoma, one of the oldest infectious diseases known to humanity, is responsible for 15 per cent of the world's blindness, primarily in Africa.

'World Sight Day is the one day of the year that we ask people to pause and think not only about their own vision but also about the eyesight of those less fortunate than themselves.'

Trachoma is caused by a micro-organism which spreads through contact with eye discharge from the infected person on towels, fingers or tissue or by flies.

Meanwhile, Beth Jost-Reimer, a Vision 2020 director, pointed out about 20 million people are blinded by cataracts — nearly half of all global blindness.

This condition is treatable. A low-cost, 20-minute surgical procedure, costing less than \$30 restores sight.

River blindness is, as it suggests, a blinding disease found primarily in West and Central Africa.

Drug companies are distributing sight-saving medication to people who are threatened by the disease linked to parasites. But more help is needed, Ms. Jost-Reimer said.

Medical attention in poor countries is far from adequate, she stressed. In Africa there is one ophthalmologist for every million people. In Canada, there's one for every 20,000.

"Given the lack of trained eye doctors in the developing world, it's not surprising to learn that over 20 million blind people living in the poorest countries could see again if they had access to cataract surgery," said Ms. Jost-Reimer.

Mayor Emmerson praised the CBMI and Vision 2020 officials and their partners including the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Eyesight International, Operation Eyesight Universal, Saving Sight Worldwide and SEVA for their efforts to conquer blindness.

Meanwhile, the mayor offered the community's support in the endeavour.

Councillor Dunkeld said residents of Whitchurch-Stouffville are quite aware of the extensive work done by the Christian Blind Mission.

"People know, especially of the CBMI's work with the blind," said Councillor Dunkeld.

Meanwhile, Councillor Dobrich pointed out world governments seem to be able to find money to put in defense budgets but can't find the funding to help children who have been blinded by war.

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