

Region's transit plan 'merits study,' minister says

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that includes York Region," he said.

Mr. Collette said the region's plan "merits study".

"We have programs in place that perhaps can support that," he said.

The region proposes to fund its share of the quick start program in annual increments, beginning next year, of \$17.3 million, \$22.3 million and \$10.4 million.

It is proposed the money would come from development charges and the issuing of debentures.

Any regional expenditure on the project would be contingent on involvement of the feds and Queen's Park. The goal is to get started on the region's rapid transit plan to alleviate traffic gridlock, said regional chairperson Bill Fisch.

The first steps would include the purchase of specialized rapid transit buses and the creation of dedicated

high-occupancy vehicle lanes on major routes, he said.

Mr. Fisch said he'll lobby for money from the federal government's municipal infrastructure fund and the province's Superbuild program.

He stressed the necessity of getting senior levels of government on board as the region tackles its costly, ambitious rapid transit vision.

Mr. Fisch will travel to Ottawa next week to pitch the funding plan to Transport Canada officials.

"We think we have a good chance of making it happen," Mr. Fisch said.

The chairperson's optimism was obvious, when he alluded to the transit funding proposal during a ceremony to launch the construction of 58 new apartments for seniors and adults with disabilities at the region's assisted living complex on Eagle Street in Newmarket.

The region is working on a plan that will provide rapid transit on the east-west Hwy. 7A corridor across the region and connect points in Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan with the Toronto Transit Commission's subway lines.

Conceptual plans call for rapid transit service to be extended along Yonge Street as far north as Newmarket.

The system, still in its earliest planning stages, could see specialized buses, light rail or even subway technology adopted over time.

The project, which will cost billions of dollars, is being undertaken by the municipality in partnership with York Consortium 2002.

That's a group that consists of private sector companies from a number of disciplines, including engineering, public transit and banking.



DAVID COLLETTE Support might be possible.



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Markham, Stouffville residents earn Rouge Park awards

BY MIKE ADLER Staff Writer

A Markham woman devoted to a local conservation area for 16 years and a Whitchurch-Stouffville couple who planted thousands of trees around their home are among those receiving Rouge Park awards this year.

All were recognized recently for helping Ontario's largest urban park, which is set to expand along the Rouge River through Markham to the river's many headwater areas in Whitchurch-Stouffville and Richmond Hill.

Lesley Price, secretary-treasurer of the Milne Park Conservation Association and a founder of the group that cares for Milne Dam Conservation Area in Markham, was given a Heritage Award for her determined efforts to protect and restore the 400-acre park on McCowan Road.

"My energy is renewed," Ms Price said. "Acting locally, I think, does work globally."

Al and Joan Johnston were presented with a River Keeper Award for contributing to the river's health beside their Bethesda Road home in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

The Johnstons, who have planted 7,500 trees and shrubs on land containing a headwater spring and ponds, received a "river keeper" sign for their gate.

Other River Keepers named to honour their environment-friendly practices at an awards night at Rouge River Community Centre in Markham were the recently-built IBM Software Lab in Markham, the Markham Green Golf Club and the Emerald Hills Golf & Country Club in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Pride in Preston Lake, a Gormley resident's group discouraging Canada geese from upsetting the ecology of their fragile kettle lake was also named a River Keeper.

Heritage Awards were also announced for Karen Boniface, parks planner for Markham, and for Dan Olding, environmental coordinator for Richmond Hill's parks and recreation department.

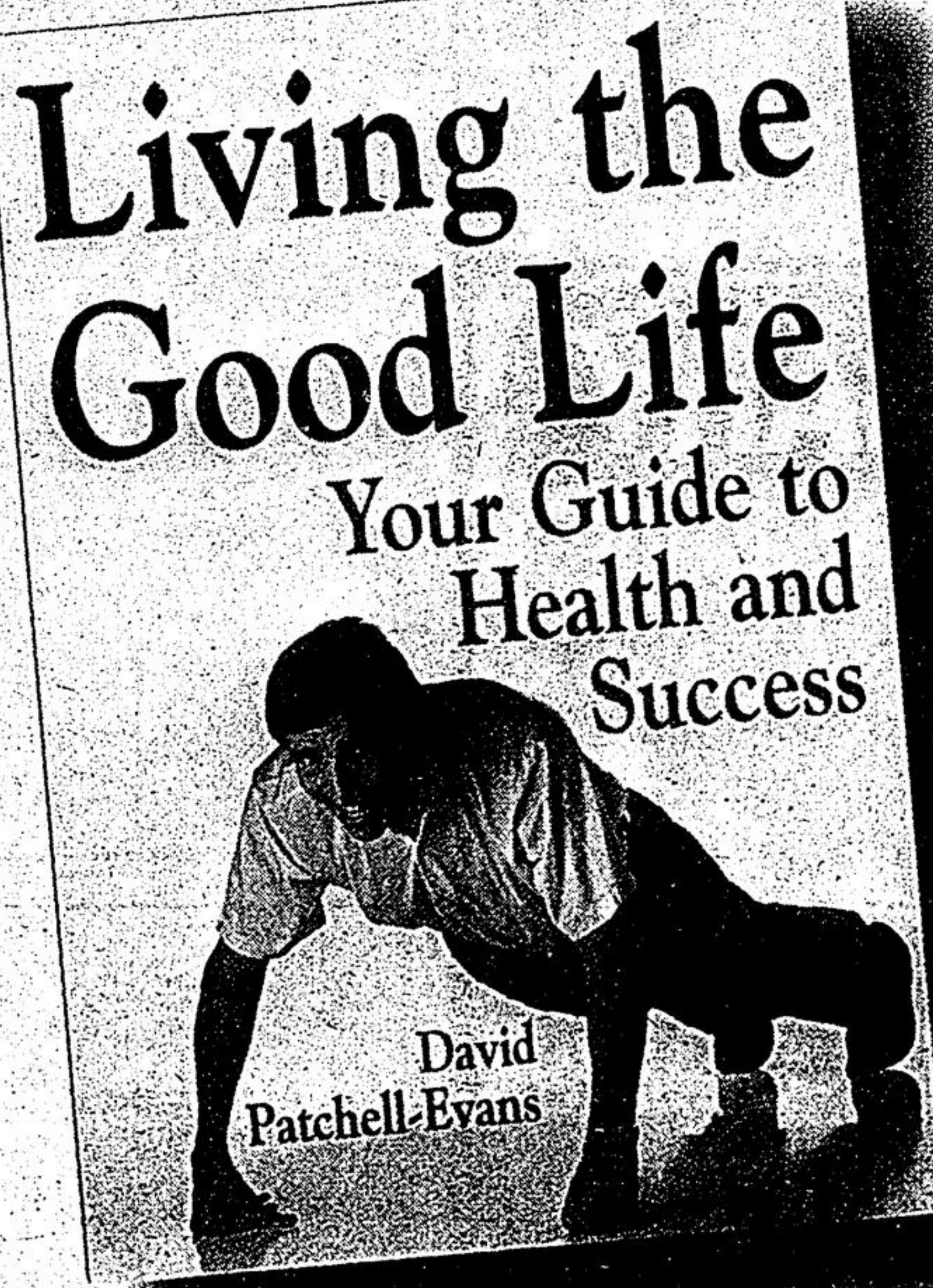
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