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IF I HAD ONE WISH ...



JOE PERSECHINI

'I want everyone to be around. I want the world to go on, a healthy, beautiful atmosphere.'



GLENN DE BAEREMAEKER

'... that the province cancel its deal with developers to allow thousands of new houses on the Oak Ridges Moraine.'



TIM JONES

'... that all of us ... are influenced ... by the character community initiatives and attributes in all that we do...'



BILL HOGARTH

'... for everyone in York Region to resolve to learn something new everyday.'

Better world tops new year's wish list

BY SIMONE JOSEPH
Staff Writer

If Joe Persechini had but one wish for 2003, it would be for clean air and water.

"I want everyone to be around. I want the world to go on, a healthy, beautiful atmosphere," he said.

Mr. Persechini was one of 10 community leaders and dignitaries across York Region interviewed about their hopes for the

new year.

We asked: "If you could have one wish for 2003, what would it be?"

With the birth of his first grandchild in October, Mr. Persechini's life and priorities have changed, he said.

The owner of Persechini Fitness & Squash Complex in Newmarket and founder of the Persechini Run/Walkathon for Easter Seals began worrying about

wider, global issues, such as the future and health of our planet.

He is not alone.

Protecting the Oak Ridges Moraine tops Glenn De Baeremaeker's wish list. The president of Save the Rouge Valley hopes the government will cancel the deal with developers that will allow homes to be built on the moraine.

He hopes the government will buy enough land to protect

the area because he fears development would negatively affect the land. Protecting the moraine is vital because of its role as the life source of many river systems, he said.

"If the moraine is polluted or contaminated, you contaminate your entire water system. It's important the water system starts off clean and clear and

See WISHES, page A7.

Drug charges top alcohol offences in police RIDE

Motorists don't seem to get message as charges on rise

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

The man flicked his marijuana joint out the window as he realized he was about to be pulled over at a RIDE stop in Markham one night last week.

Unfortunately for him, it got caught on the window sill of the driver's door and was an easy find for Const. Robert Sierakowski.

The driver was charged with impaired driving. A quick search of the vehicle turned up other drugs.

This year, for the first time in the history of the RIDE campaign, York Regional Police have charged more motorists with drug offences than drinking and driving.

Although York's RIDE program runs all year, the campaign is stepped up during the holiday season.

Seven drivers have been charged with drug offences while five have been charged with alcohol-related crimes, Staff Sgt. Doug Hall said.

"A lot of people are using the wacky tobacky," he said. "We're a bit alarmed with the drugs."

In total, 29 drivers were issued 12-hour suspensions. Police laid one charge of impaired driving, four charges of operating a vehicle with more

than 80 mgs of alcohol and seven drug-related charges.

Officers stopped 13,598 vehicles as of last Friday, compared to 10,507 during the same period last year. Fourteen drivers were given 12-hour suspensions in 2001, while one driver was charged with driving with more than 80 mgs of alcohol.

Const. Sierakowski, who has been involved on and off with the RIDE program for more than 20 years, has also noticed more drivers operating vehicles under the influence of drugs.

"I've seen five people arrest-

See MOTORISTS, page A10.



HEIDI KREINER LEY

'... that our education system be given a boost and that we see ... that it's bolstered with the funds that are needed.'



DR. HAROLD GROSSMAN

'... that there would be even more acceptance of psychiatric conditions...'



FILOMENA WILLIAMS

'... (to) acquire some funds to build a new shelter ... that's more conducive to women and children.'



DOROTHY GILBERT

'That we have peace and don't have to go to war and have people killed.'

Region embraces 'cornerstones of growth'

BY JEFF MITCHELL
Staff Writer

When you envision York Region five, 10 or 20 years from now, what do you see?

Is wall-to-wall development the signature of the future? Or does growth stop at some boundary, municipal or otherwise?

Where will the open spaces be? Where will the factories be located?

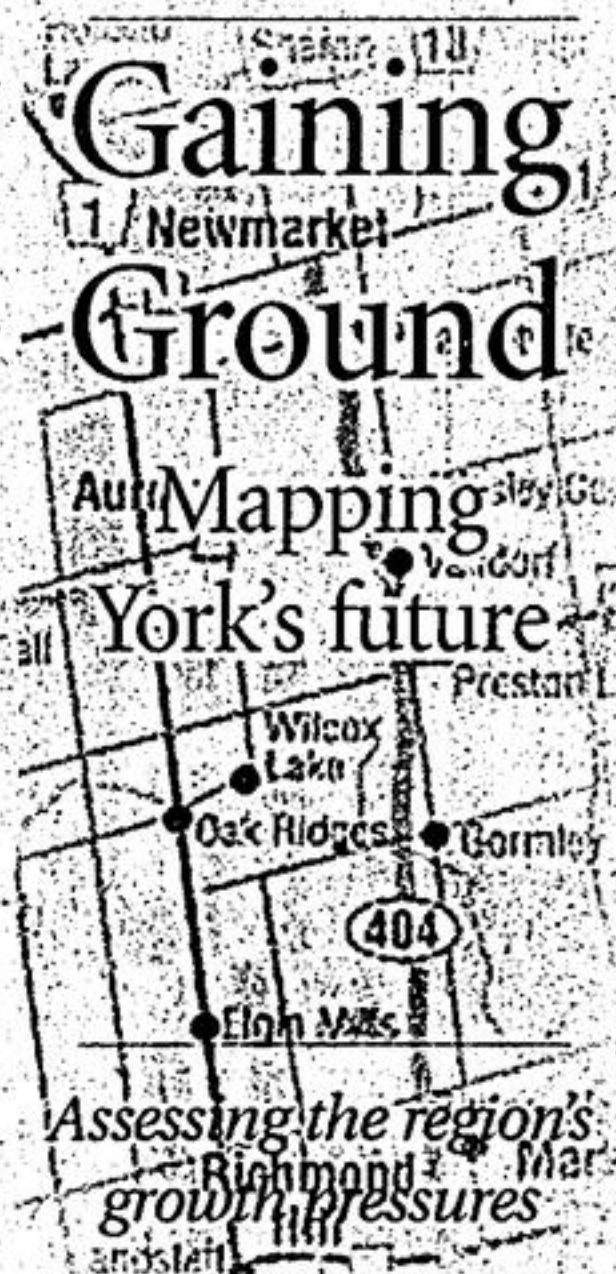
Charting growth areas / page A9.

How, in 20 short years, will the needs of an anticipated one million residents be managed?

Welcome to municipal planning in the 21st century. It's a balancing act between strategic growth management, preservation of natural resources and the provision of hard and soft services.

A little optimism helps, as well.

"We think we have one of the most advanced and successful growth management and community building systems in North America," said Bryan Tuckey, York Region's planning commissioner.



"We've been able to manage this growth and provide levels of service to 40,000 (new residents) a year for the last three years. And I think our biggest successes have been related to comprehensive development."

Planning is dominated by numbers. In York Region, those numbers are huge: a population



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

The winter sun sets on a scene now familiar to residents of booming York Region: bulldozers and construction vehicles dotting once fertile fields and greenlands.

of 820,000 today, expected to grow to as much as 1.3 million by 2026; an anticipated 40,000 new residents a year; an annual growth rate of 5.7 per cent; numerous subdivisions in the works and almost 50,000 draft approved, registered and as-yet unbuilt residential and industrial units, which amount to a five-

year supply of property that can be developed.

As of mid-2002, Markham had 10,000 draft approved units, Vaughan had more than 13,000 and Richmond Hill had 12,800 on the books. Aurora has 4,230 units approved; Newmarket 2,800 and East Gwillimbury and Georgina have draft approved

reserves in excess of 2,000 each. King Township has 400 units approved and Whitchurch-Stouffville, 760.

To balance the pressures of development with the needs and wants of residents, four so-called cornerstones for growth

See CONSTRUCTION, page A12.

Regional taxpayers could see \$80 hike

BY JEFF MITCHELL
Staff Writer

Your regional tax bill could go up by as much as \$80 next year, according to preliminary budget figures released Thursday.

It would mark the third consecutive year taxes have gone up in the region.

Once again, the police budget is the leading expenditure for the region, with a forecast increase of as much as \$10 million. Transit will cost an additional \$7 million as service is increased and new buses hit the roads.

And the region's cost for waste management is climbing to more than \$14 million as a result of disposal costs being shifted away from municipalities.

The days of zero budget increases are likely gone for good, said Aurora Mayor Tim Jones, chairperson of the region's finance committee.

That's because the demand for services by York's growing population has caught up with the increased tax assessment all those new homes and businesses created, he said.

"I think the zero budget increase days were a result of huge assessment growth," Mr. Jones said.

"I think the wise and the prudent way of going ahead is not trying to apply a zero increase."

The \$1.4-billion draft budget tabled Thursday during regional council's meeting in Newmarket calls for \$470 million to be raised through property

See REGION, page A13.

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