

Save The Rouge staff quits; group thrown out of offices

From page 1.
tributary banks — triple the usual distance.

"Some trees were cut down, that is true. But we got the best deal we possibly could," he said, adding he had

not realized the province and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority would give builders permis-

sion to lower the creek. The builders' money, meanwhile, remains in trust for what should be five to 10

years of restoration and tree planting, work guided by Save the Rouge. Mr. De Baeremaeker is confident it will start in the spring.

Founded in 1975 and instrumental in the creation of Rouge Park, Save the Rouge has had a turbulent year and its paid membership, about 2,000 during the group's high-profile battles for the Oak Ridges Moraine a few years ago, has fallen to about 250.

The group's volunteer president since 1997, Mr. De Baeremaeker resigned from the board in January, intending, he said, to become a full-time paid staff member.

After \$200,000 in Trillium Foundation funding for the group was not renewed, however, Mr. De Baeremaeker was re-appointed to the board. He has also been running for a council seat in Scarborough.

A few weeks after the group's annual meeting in September, the entire staff of Save of Rouge — an administrator, two biologists and a bookkeeper — quit, saying they were no longer comfortable with the organization.

Mr. De Baeremaeker said the board will wait until after the municipal election to replace the staff, adding none of the group's work in the watershed will be affected. "There won't be one less tree planted."

Mark Carroll also resigned as sole employee for GTA Wetland Watch, a group sharing office space, a bookkeeper and other resources with Save the Rouge.

Mr. Carroll, a biologist and Whitchurch-Stouffville councillor, said he was disturbed by Mr. De Baeremaeker's deal with developers and concerned about payments made to Mr. De Baeremaeker

as a consultant for GTA Wetland Watch.

"They were a good advocacy group," Mr. Carroll said of Save the Rouge. "They did a lot, but they just stepped over a line I couldn't be happy with."

GTA Wetland Watch began a multi-year tree planting and habitat creation project this spring on the Ontario SPCAs property in northern Whitchurch-Stouffville, but it was halted after Mr. Carroll laid out his concerns to SPCA management. "We did some really good work on their property, but it had to end," said Mr. Carroll, who hopes to continue the project with another non-profit group.

He said he discovered GTA Wetland Watch, for no obvious reason, was making payments to New Dawn Consulting, a company run by Mr. De Baeremaeker, who supports himself by consulting for environmental groups.

"Why is New Dawn getting funds for projects when I did all the planning?" Mr. Carroll asked.

Ian Glynwilliams, president of GTA Wetland Watch and treasurer of Save the Rouge, said New Dawn was paid because Mr. De Baeremaeker provided it with strategic advice, funding proposals and contacts. Mr. De Baeremaeker said he has never received money for work he did not do.

Save the Rouge is participating in an Ontario Municipal Board hearing on the Leslie North development area in Richmond Hill, but Mr. De Baeremaeker said it is withdrawing from a hearing on Box Grove in Markham because it doesn't have the resources to address both at once.

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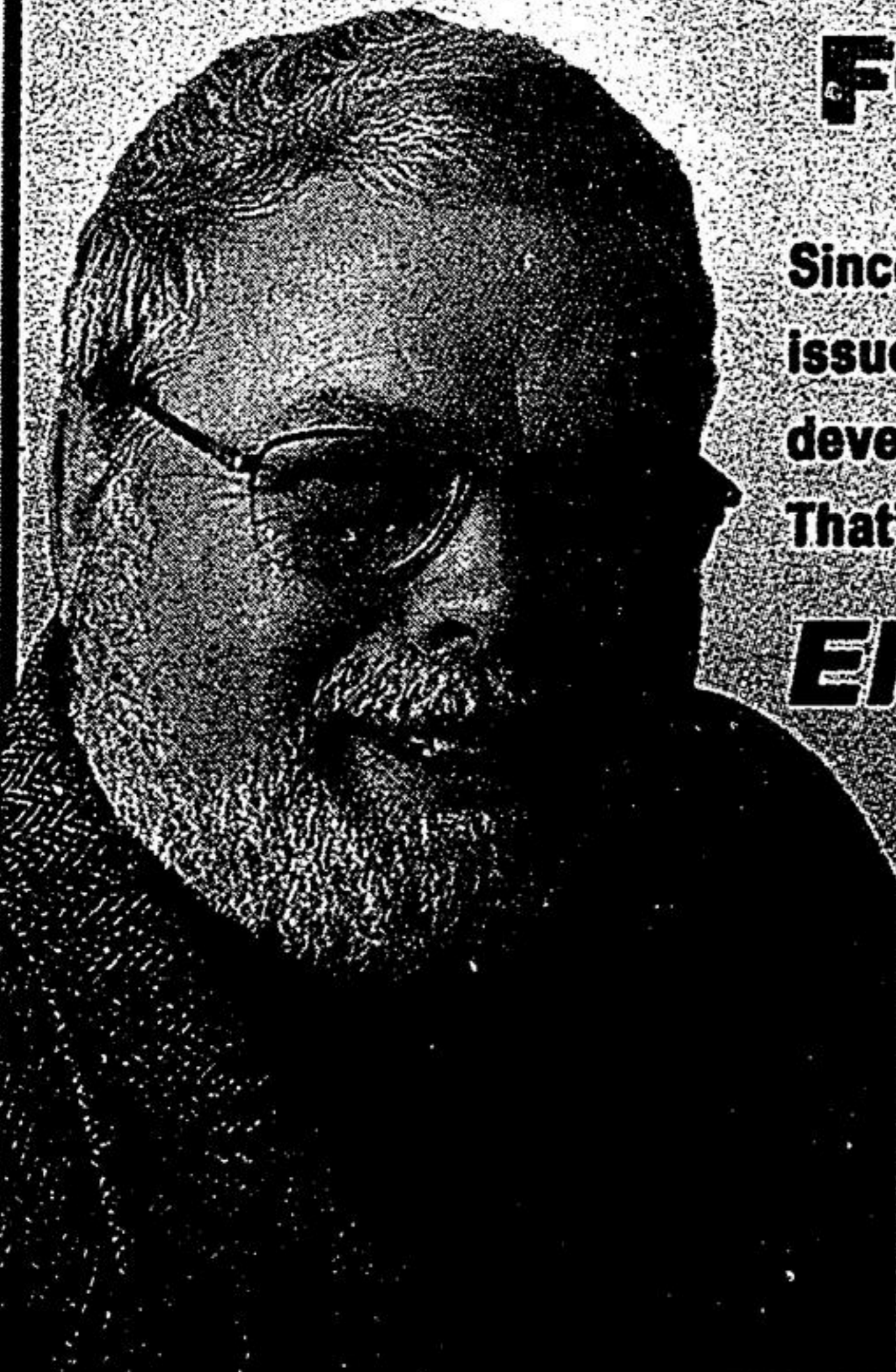
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