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THURSDAY FOCUS

Stouffville dad wants relief from fatal disease

On borrowed time

Province won't fund expensive medication

BY CHRIS TRABER
 Staff Writer

Gerry Irwin says he's living on borrowed time — time that until last February was relatively qualitative and quantitative until the province further procrastinated on its decision to fund a new drug used to treat his rare disorder.

Mr. Irwin is one of an estimated 300 Canadians with Fabry disease, a genetic enzyme deficiency that leads to the accumulation of molecules around vital organs to the point of strangulation.

Each patient reacts differently. In Mr. Irwin's case, the malady has led to several strokes, a heart condition, hearing loss and life in a wheelchair.

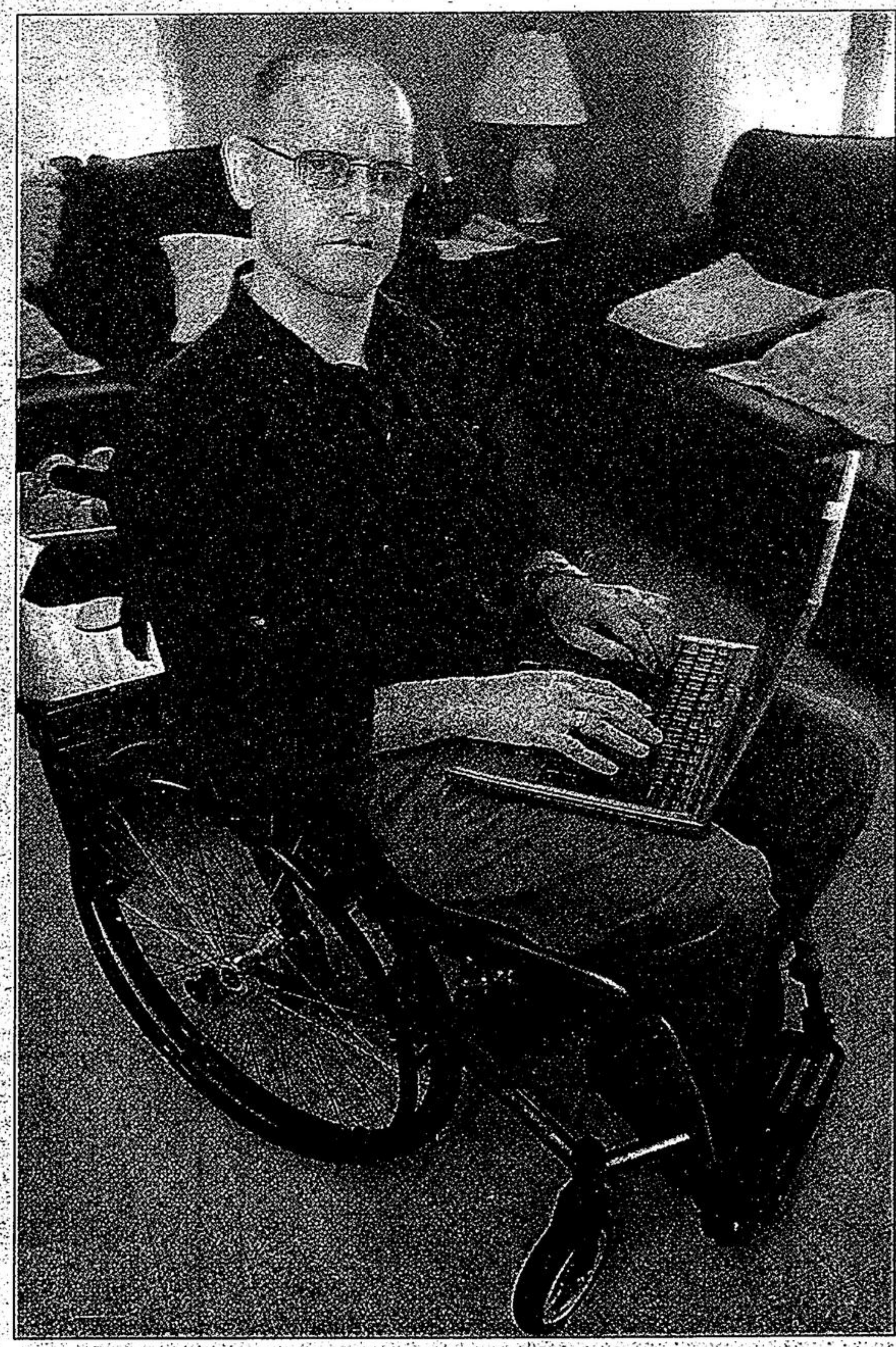
"Fabry is considered a fatal disease," said the Stouffville father of two first diagnosed with the illness in 1989. "They say it'll kill you by age 50. I'm a month away from that birthday. I don't know if I'm in the middle or late stages of the disease."

In the early 1990s, the former bank computer developer participated in Fabry research conducted in New York City. The disease forced him to take permanent disability leave in 1994.

"There were no drug treatments at the time," he said. "Doctors could only treat the symptoms."

"Thankfully, my employer had policies that provided disability payments. We couldn't have made it without that because it costs money to make a home wheelchair accessible and to convert a car to hand controls."

In 2001, US-based Transkaryotic



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Gerry Irwin of Stouffville has Fabry disease, a fatal illness that strangles organs. He wants the province to pay for drugs that cost \$25,000 each for twice monthly infusions. "They say it'll kill you by age 50," said Mr. Irwin, 49.

See PREMIER, page 11.

Sewage spill prompts call for lagoon inspections

No contamination from duck plant overflow

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
 Staff Writer

A 5.4-million gallon sewage spill in northern Whitchurch-Stouffville Friday has triggered a call for safety inspections at lagoons.

The sewage material, identified as agriculture waste, came from a lagoon tied to a private treatment plant system at King Cole Ducks at Warden Avenue and Aurora Road.

"I was quite in awe of the mess," said Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Sue Sherban, who visited the site Saturday morning.

MAYOR WANTS ANSWERS

While tests results from the spill show no signs of E. coli contamination, Mrs. Sherban wants answers in regards to the structural safety of lagoons in the municipality, including the four at King Cole Ducks.

"Once a year, these lagoon ponds should be checked for erosion," Mrs. Sherban said. "We should make sure the company doesn't get a permit to operate until the inspections show it's safe. I'm looking for



SUE SHERBAN: "In awe of mess" at King Cole Ducks, mayor wants annual inspection of facilities.

answers. Who was responsible for the lagoons at King Cole Ducks?"

Whitchurch-Stouffville Fire and Emergency Services, Environment Ministry and York Region officials were called to the spill about 10:30 p.m.

"It was a significant spill," ministry spokesperson John Steele said. "The manure material went into the ground, area ditches and water courses."

Muskrats may be responsible, said King Cole spokesperson Patti Thompson. Burrowing muskrats have

See DUCK, page 26.

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