

United Way takes flight at airport

BY LINDA JOHNSON
Staff Writer

Short of jumping out of a plane, it's hard to think of a more exciting way to raise money than the United Way's open house Saturday.

Actually, they are jumping out of a plane.

The open house at Buttonville Airport at 16th Avenue and Hwy. 404 runs from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and includes helicopter and airplane rides, skydivers, airplane displays and pony rides.

The event drew 2,500 people last year.

Admittance is free.

"It's going to be a big, free family affair with lots of carnival rides and games. The kids can visit the aircraft as well," CEO Rahul Bhardwaj said.

York Region's United Way funds 37 member agencies which in turn, provide more than 100 programs that help families, youth and children in crisis, senior citizens and people with special needs.

The goal of this year's cam-

paign is \$7.25 million.

"It's aggressive and achievable," Mr. Bhardwaj said, noting the goal marks an almost 7-per-cent increase over last year's aim of \$6.75 million.

"The need in York Region just keeps growing and we need to grow just to keep up with the basic need," he said. "Some of the information coming out of the region these days is pretty scary."

For instance, Mr. Bhardwaj said, 72,000 to 75,000 residents fall below the low-income line — that's about 10 per cent of the region's population.

"If all those people lived in one place in the region, it would be the fourth largest municipality in York Region. It would be bigger than Newmarket," he said.

Even more worrisome, he added, is that more than 50 per cent of these people have jobs and more than 60 per cent have at least a high school education.

Overall, many people have trouble finding jobs, others are struggling with the high cost of

living in the region.

Then, there's also a lack of facilities for families, seniors, children and youth in crisis.

"There's a host of issues. And they're not getting smaller; they're just getting bigger," he said.

"People sometimes fall between the cracks or just find they hit a rough spot in life.

"When that happens, where do you turn? It seems United Way is the (group) that really fills that gap."

In addition to direct funding, the United Way provides funds to agencies that are not members.

It also offers consulting to non-profit agencies to help them provide services more efficiently and effectively.

Planning is already underway for the York Region Celebrity Golf Challenge Oct. 4 at Eagles Nest Golf Club at 10000 Dufferin St. in Maple.

For more information, call 905-474-9974 or 1-877-241-4516 or visit www.unitedwayyorkregion.com

Vibrant economy buoys York

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largest employers, exports 90 per cent of its office furniture to the U.S.

But the company's vice-president of operations, Gene Lai, said it has been unscathed by external economic forces so far.

In fact, Steelcase conducted a hiring drive earlier this month to fill 100 positions.

"We buy a lot of our parts from the United States, so it offsets the impact of the Canadian dollar," Mr. Lai said.

"We're keeping an eye on it, but it hasn't impacted us."

But Tory MPP Ted Chudleigh, the party's economic development critic, said the worst may be yet to come.

Earlier this month, the Halton politician even hinted at a possible recession.

If that's the case, you can bet big industry in Ontario will be looking to their government to maintain a competitive climate.

"You've got to make a competitive tax jurisdiction," Mr. Chudleigh said.

While things may be looking up for York's manufacturers, economists paint a short-term picture that includes a strong dollar, rising energy prices and rising interest rates.

It's an outlook sure to make the business community stand up and take notice, Mr. Eastwood said.

"We tend to feel it less in the GTA because we have a vibrant economy. But we won't be immune."

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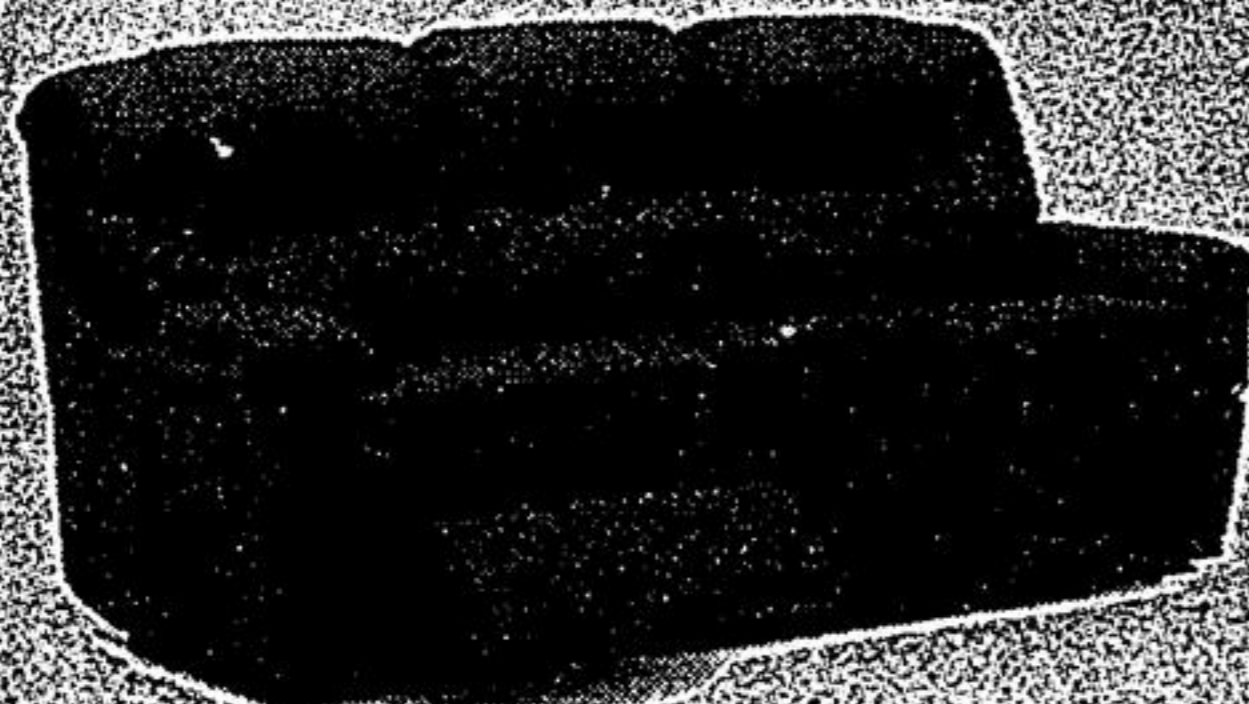
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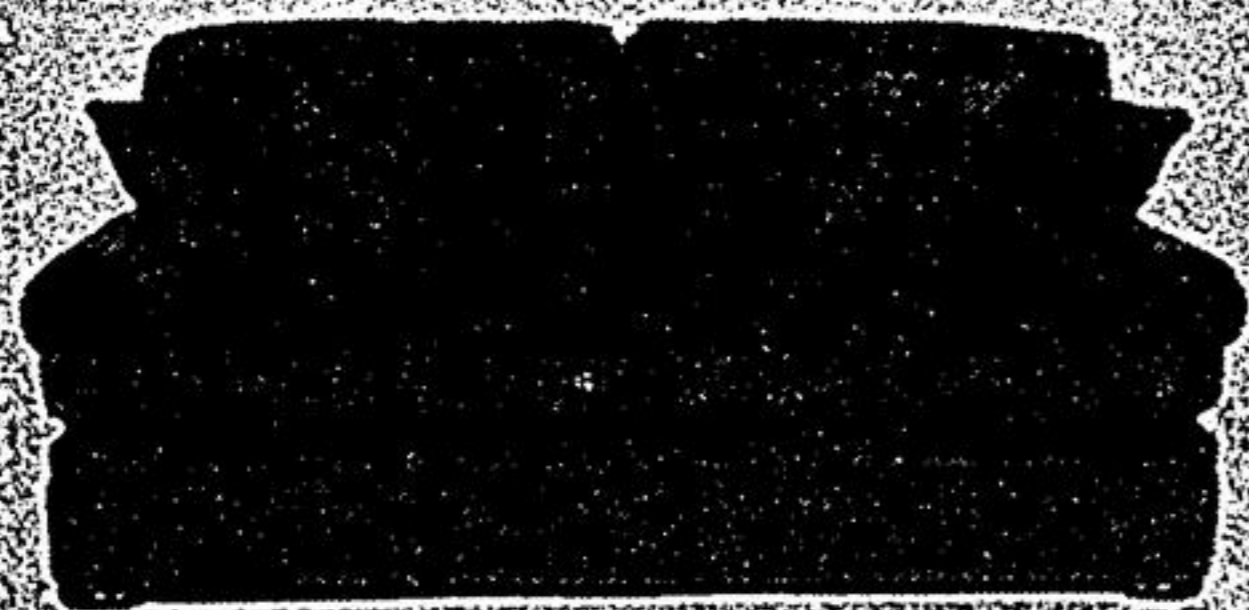


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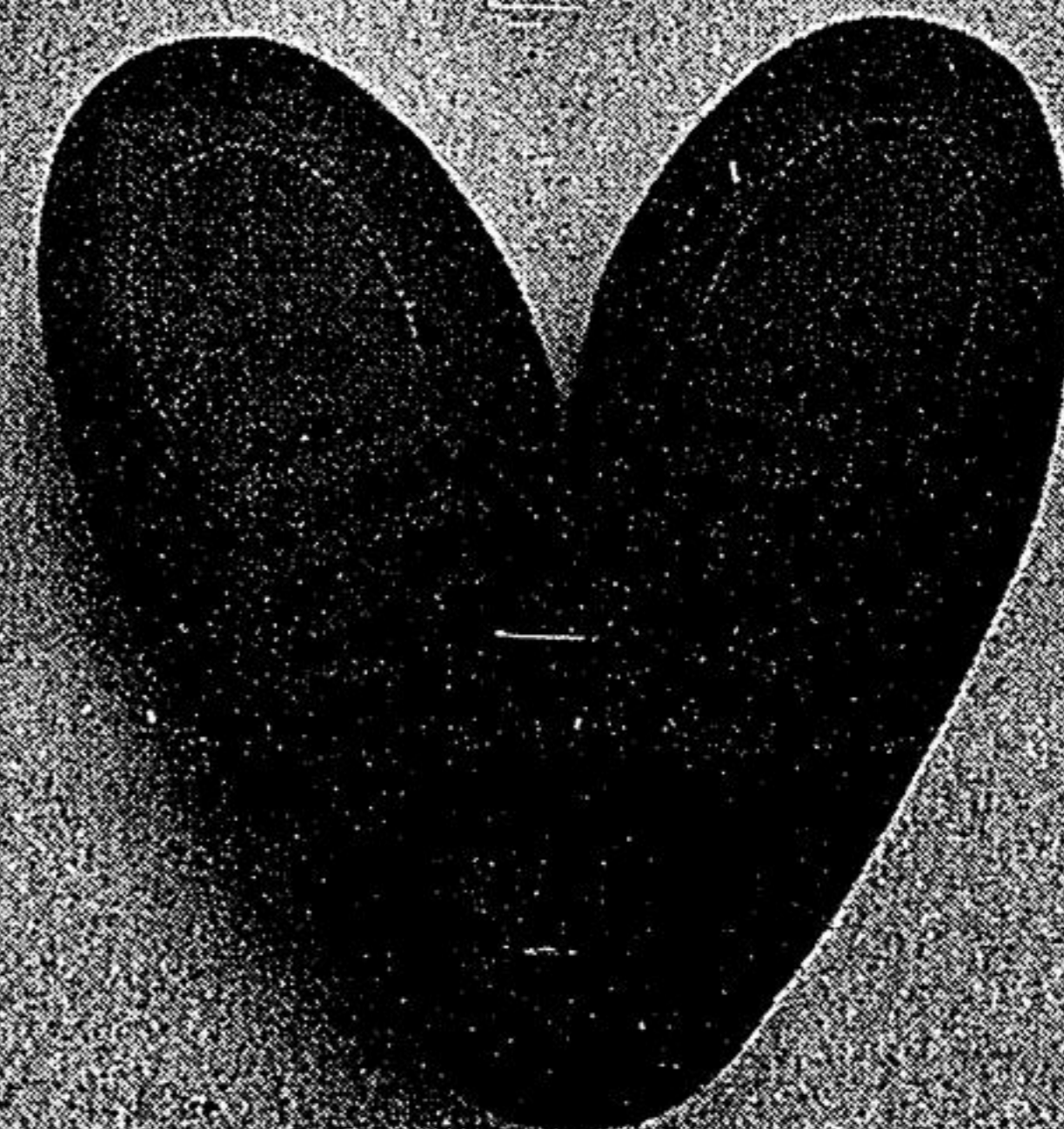
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