

GO, CN marriage ending

Tenders going out for train crews

BY DAVID BLUMENFELD
Staff Writer

With recent performance reviews under acceptable levels, GO Transit plans to put out to tender its contract for rail crews to improve service, a move that will likely sever 40-year ties with CN Rail.

In a December memo from GO Transit CEO Gary McNeil, board members were told a competitive bid process would provide the commuter rail service with a higher quality of service at less cost.

CN provides rail crews for six of seven GO lines, while CP Rail provides crews on the Milton line.

GO Transit has the right to put its contract for rail crews out for bidding, CN Rail spokesperson Mark Hallman said.

"It's their prerogative to have whatever process they want... to seek competitive tenders," Mr. Hallman said. "It's a business decision they've made in terms of crewing and maintenance."

He said CN will not bid on a new deal. Its contract with GO expires in

2008. CN has provided crews to GO Transit since its inception.

GO Transit's on-time performance in the latter half of 2006 fluctuated from a low of 81 per cent in October to a high of 89 per cent in November.

GO said it aims for performance times in the low to mid-90s.

Mr. Hallman could not say if GO's decision to put its rail crews contract out to tender would affect an earlier agreement between CN and the United Transportation Union (UTU) to keep GO trains running if a conductors' strike this weekend.

"I can't speculate. The two parties have signed an agreement that in the event of a strike the UTU members would continue to protect GO commuter rail service," Mr. Hallman said.

Although CN conductors have said they will continue to provide crews to GO Transit in the event of strike, they have the right to withdraw service with three days notice.

"As far as we know things are still the same and we will be providing service based on the agreement the UTU and CN made," said Stephanie Sorensen of GO Transit public affairs.

GO trains move approximately 165,000 passengers every weekday.

Will smaller class sizes mean more busing?

BY TERESA LATCHFORD
Staff Writer

Busing students out of their own community to reach a government class size mandate is ridiculous, says a York Region parent.

By 2008, the province expects all school boards, including those in York, will have 90 per cent of primary classes capped at 20 pupils. The rest will have no more than 23 to allow for the enrollment fluctuation.

To meet the mandate, the York public board will create split-grade classes and may bus students to schools outside their communities.

"They can't even bus within their own community right now," Thornhill parent Krista Olins said. "My kids live 01 kilometres too far to be eligible for busing."

Parents want children at near-by schools since the community is centred around its school, she added. To take students to another school in a different town effects the sense of pride children are supposed to have in their communities.

Smaller primary class sizes are supposed to mean more individ-

ual attention for your child.

Newmarket mother Victoria Whiteside likes that, but said "I'd be beside myself if my child had to be bused to a different community to go to school. It would affect him socially."

Not only is she concerned her son would attend a different school than neighbourhood children, but seeing classmates after school would prove difficult and even being on a bus at such a young age is not a positive experience.

"Starting school is hard enough and not knowing anyone makes it even harder," Mrs. Whiteside said. "It's not easy for the kids."

Busing students outside their communities will be rare, York Region District School Board spokesperson Ross Virgo said.

"If it does happen, we have created an option for parents to request the student return to the local school in the intermediate grades," he said.

Laura Sailes, Richmond Hill mother of four, has no problem with her children being bused. However, she would be asking questions if she lived near a school.

"Busing is always an issue when it comes to supervision, but other than that, the board is already busing students," she said.

The other concern with reaching a capped class size of 20 is creating split classes to accommodate the overflow of students whose numbers are not enough to justify another single-grade class.

Mrs. Olins believes split classes are fine for bright students, but the average student would struggle to keep up.

"You are squishing two grades in one," she pointed out.

"The teacher's focus is split, time is split and most of us do only one job well, unless we are super multi-taskers."

Mrs. Sailes grew up with split classes and has no bad memories. Her own daughter excelled in a split class, since it challenged her to keep up with students in the higher grade.

"Sometimes it is hard on the kids or sometimes they do really well," she added.

"But with my experience, the school tries to match the right, more advanced, student to a split class."

Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day Contest

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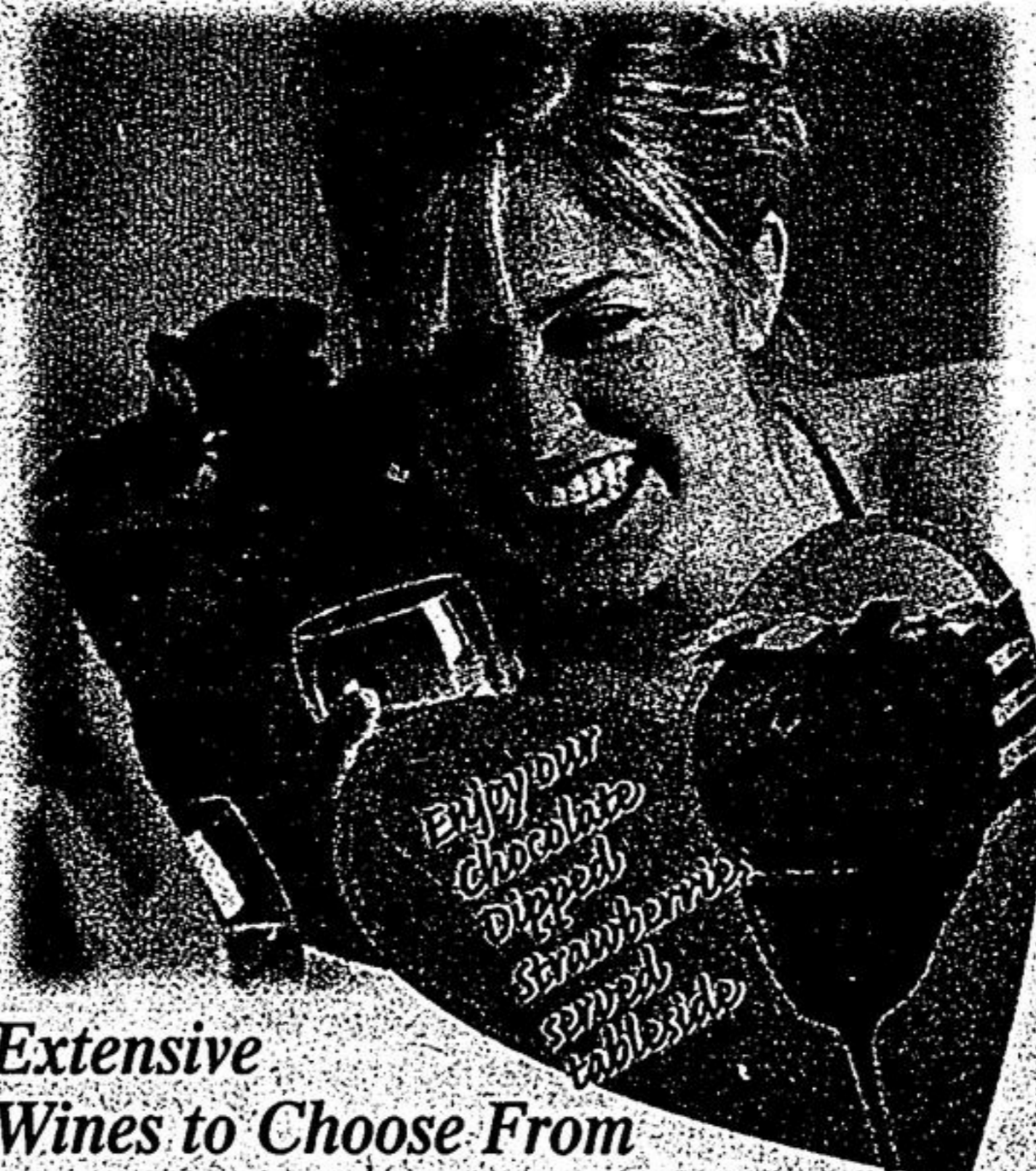
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Every February, across the country, candy, flowers, and gifts are exchanged between loved ones, all in the name of St. Valentine. But who is this mysterious saint and why do we celebrate this holiday? The history of Valentine's Day - and its patron saint - is shrouded in mystery. But we do know that February has long been a month of romance. St. Valentine's Day, as we know it today, contains vestiges of both Christian and ancient Roman tradition. So, who was Saint Valentine and how did he become associated with this ancient rite? Today, the Catholic Church recognizes at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentinus, all of whom were martyred.

One legend contends that Valentine was a priest who served during the third century in Rome. When Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers than those with wives and families, he outlawed marriage for young men - his crop of potential soldiers. Valentine, realizing the injustice of the decree, defied Claudius and continued to perform marriages for young lovers in secret. When Valentine's actions were discovered, Claudius ordered that he be put to death.

Other stories suggest that Valentine may have been killed for attempting to help Christians escape harsh Roman prisons where they were often beaten and tortured.

According to one legend, Valentine actually sent the first 'valentine' greeting himself. While in prison, it is believed that Valentine fell in love with a young girl - who may have been his jailor's