

United Way luncheon sells out, raises \$664K

BY CHRIS TRABER
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The mood was light, the turnout heavy at United Way of York Region's 29th annual building industry luncheon Tuesday at Le Parc in Markham.

The 1,300 registered guests raised \$664,000, a 10-per-cent increase over last year's event, making the unofficial launch of the 2011 United Way campaign the first sell-out ever.

"In a world of so many great events, there is something magical about this one," United Way chief executive officer Daniele Zanotti said. "This luncheon galvanizes an entire industry around one cause. The builders provide the hard infrastructure of our communities. United Way offers the soft infrastructure that supports the community."

"The industry builds the houses. We help make them homes."

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty was guest speaker, opening with a timely Stanley Cup quip, suggesting that while the two finalists are from Canada and the United States, Game 7 will determine which team has the best Canadian hockey players. Some electioneering followed, ensuring Mr. Fisch that Ontario's infrastructure investments will keep pace with the region's growth and Mr. McGuinty also debuted a proposed service guarantee for GO Transit commuters. Once the details are ironed out, customers may have fares refunded if trains are more than 20 minutes late.

The premier, who told the gathering he

hopes to renew his contract "with the good people of Ontario Oct. 6", said 94 per cent of GO Transit service is on time. The other 6 per cent, including 1 per cent involving delays of 20 minutes or more, can be improved. The service guarantee could cost the transit service \$6.7 million annually.

Considering his audience, Mr. McGuinty sustained a string of construction metaphors.

"Ontario was not an overnight success," he said. "Our people, hard workers, not complainers, built it. We're workers who never put our tools down."

The premier lauded the province's builders, suggesting it was the industry's resolve and tenacity that helped Ontario survive the recession. During the fiscal swoon, 257,000 Ontario jobs were lost, he said. Since then, 278,000 jobs have been created.

"We can't let up," he said. "Now that we've turned the corner, we can't turn back."

In the three decades of the luncheon, more than \$6 million has been raised for United Way of York Region, Mr. Zanotti said.

Dollars raised at the event support member agencies across York Region to meet the immediate frontline needs of our community, he said.

Funds also support research that invests in three priority areas, including helping children be all they can be, moving from poverty to possibility and creating strong, healthy neighbourhoods.

Each year, one in three York Region residents benefits from United Way-funded programs, Mr. Zanotti said.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty (centre) has lunch with building industry luncheon co-chairperson Alfredo De Gasperis (from left), Vaughan MPP Greg Sorbara and United Way of York Region CEO Daniele Zanotti at Le Parc in Thornhill Tuesday.

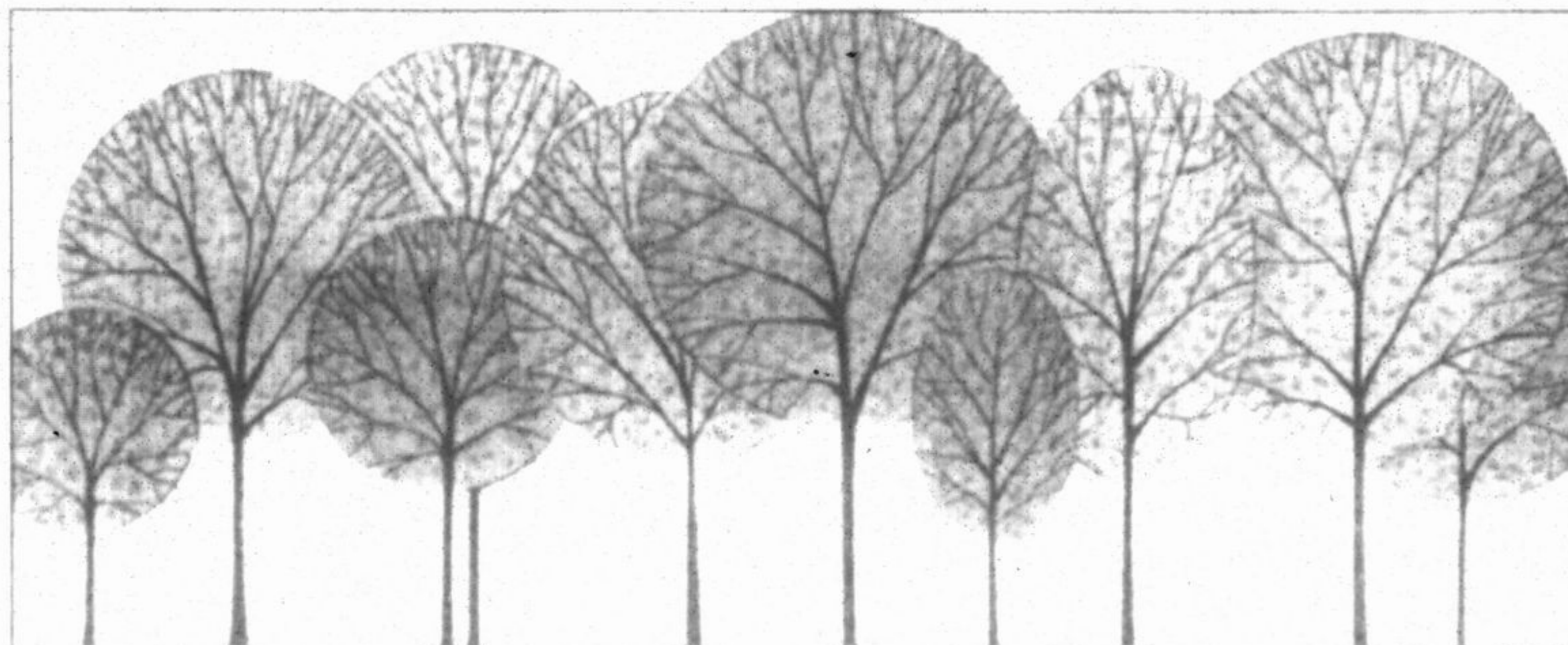
Condrain Group chairperson Alfredo De Gasperis and York Region chairperson and chief executive officer Bill Fisch serve as event co-chairpersons.

Mr. De Gasperis applauded his peers.

"I have co-chaired this event for 29 years now and each year, no matter what the economy, we raise more for United Way thanks to hard work and immense generosity," he said. "I'm very proud of our building industry community and this longstanding partnership

with United Way of York Region. Together, we are supporting the infrastructure that makes our region great."

Established in 1976, United Way of York Region is a registered charity uniting people and resources to improve our communities. The organization, which raised a record \$8.1 million last year, identifies community priorities and works with partners to take action, supporting a network of programs across the region's nine municipalities.



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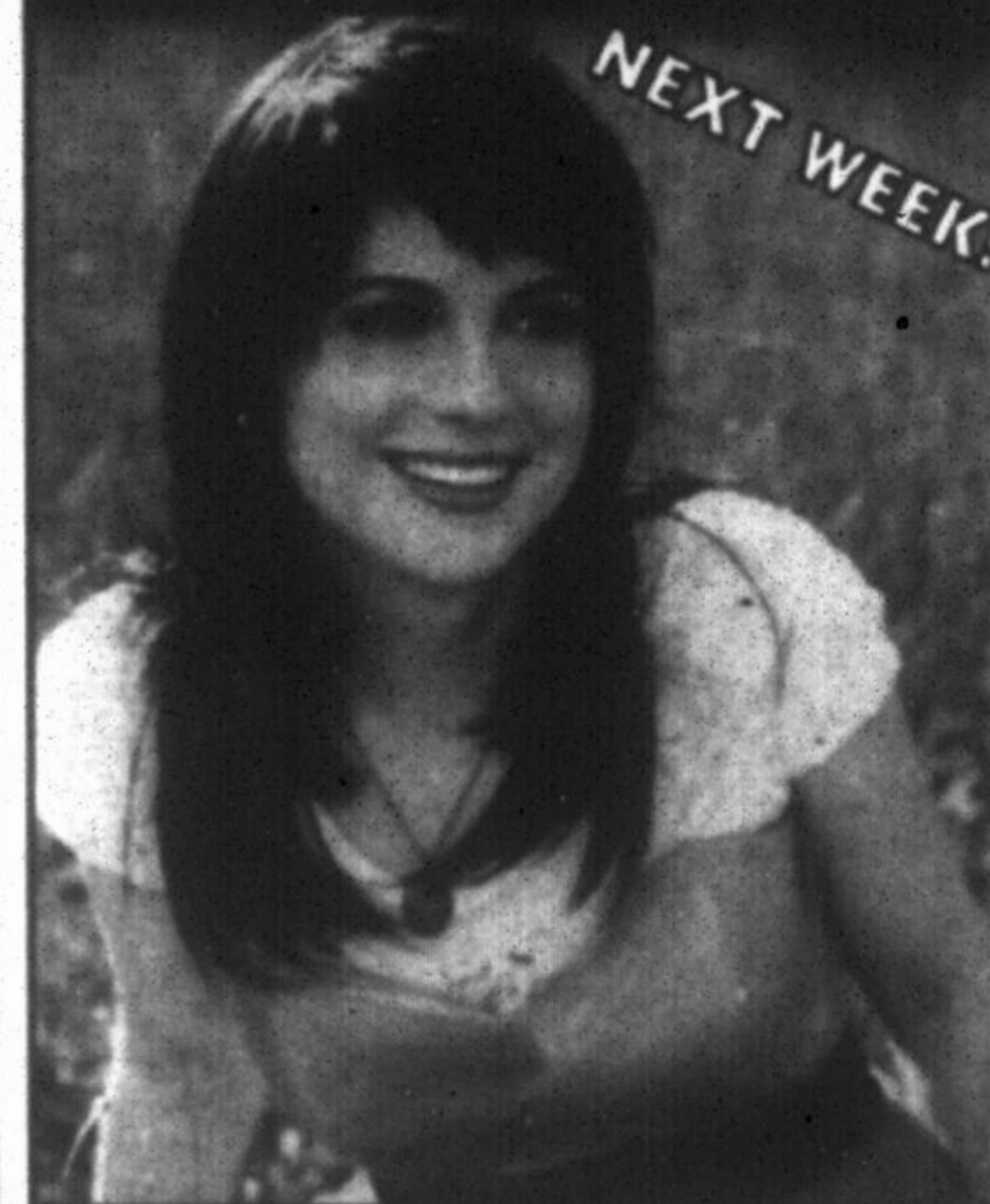
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