

LOCAL

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Water main on Upper James breaks again

Bert Posedowski, manager of water distribution, says a water main on Upper James Street that has broken twice in almost the same place in recent months is on the list for replacement, but that won't happen until the road is rebuilt, a project now slated for 2010.

Yesterday's break, between Stone Church and Rymal roads, was less than 10 metres from one during the summer. Posedowski said it's an old eight-inch (20 centimetre), cast iron main.

The break reported shortly before 2 a.m. was fixed and the water back on between 6:30 and 7 a.m., but traffic was limited to one lane in each direction until about 9 a.m.

Posedowski said a coffee shop may have been without water for a short time, but the early hour meant other businesses were not affected and no homes lost water service.

The wait for replacement is in line with city policy to schedule underground utility work at the time roads are rebuilt, to save money, avoid digging up new pavement and minimize traffic disruption.

— The Hamilton Spectator

Mac gets \$1m to research spinal cord injuries

Researchers at McMaster University have been awarded \$1 million to investigate how to increase physical activity in people with spinal cord injuries in order to improve their physical and psychological well-being and quality of life.

About 50,000 Canadians live with spinal cord injuries, many of whom believe their injuries are a life sentence to inactivity.

Kathleen Martin Ginis, an associate professor of kinesiology at Mac who is heading the research, says physical activity can have huge benefits. Physical activity programs and information are the two services most wanted by people with spinal cord injuries but least available to them, she says. The research goals are to find people with the knowledge and skills to start a physical activity program and to find the most effective way of getting the word out about the programs.

The five-year research project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Another \$1.3 million for the project will come from McMaster University and community groups.

— The Hamilton Spectator

Copper wire thieves risking electrocution

BURLINGTON ♦ Halton police fear someone will die trying to steal expensive copper wire as thieves attack live transformers.

With scrap prices for copper and aluminum having doubled in the last two years and now at an 18-year high, police have noticed a dangerous trend in copper wire thefts from active, high-voltage equipment.

The disturbing part is wire is being taken from active transformers, Detective Constable Ewen Crook said in a statement yesterday.

In each case, the suspects took the grounding wire and did not touch the live wire. Police are concerned tampering with live wires could result in electrocution.

Crook said the Burlington break and enter squad reported five thefts in the city in October in which one-inch thick copper grounding wire was stolen. Police say they are working with reputable scrap metal dealers and other area police forces to track the thieves and have increased patrols in industrial areas. Police are asking that scrap metal and/or copper wire be secured and protected.

— John Burman, The Hamilton Spectator

Tenants seeking compensation

Forced to flee crumbling building

BY DANA BORCEA

Tenants of a St. Joseph's Drive building described at a hearing held yesterday the inconvenience and pain caused when they were suddenly evacuated from their apartments.

Ten former tenants of the Ambassador Heights building are seeking compensation from the building's owner, Robert Creek, at a Landlord and Tenant Board hearing currently under way.

The legal body handles disputes between landlords and tenants.

Eleven families were forced out of their apartments by the city on April 4 after a badly damaged retaining wall sparked fears of a building collapse.

Some had a few minutes to collect what they could before fleeing while others came home to find access to their belongings barred.

Tenants were not officially allowed to return to collect their belongings until June 18, though some snuck in earlier to claim their things after reports of burglaries.

The building remains uninhabitable.

Desiree Bates described her horror at returning home the night of the evacuation and being told by officials she could not enter.

Bates and her seven-year-old daughter lived with a friend for the next six months until moving into a new apartment last month.

She broke down crying while describing how she was told by the landlord she could go to a shelter.

"I work hard," she said. "I like my freedom. I didn't want to put my daughter through that. I didn't want to put myself through that."

Bates is seeking close to the \$10,000 maximum amount allowed under the Residential Tenancies Act.

Included in that amount is \$3,000 — being claimed by each of the applicants — for ongoing inconvenience and stress following the evacuation.

The rest represents the expense of replacing items, such as clothing for her and her daughter as well as electronics and jewellery stolen when her apartment was broken into.



RON ALBERTSON, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR
Ambassador Heights building owner Robert Creek at yesterday's hearing.

She described returning to find cigarette butts on her floor, a pizza box on her bed and clothing that didn't belong to her, leading her to believe people had been squatting in her apartment.

Several other tenants testified their apartments had been broken into and their valuables stolen.

Some testified to finding security guards hired by Creek either sleeping or not present.

Irena Sholla said she returned often to check on the building's progress.

She said she saw a security guard sleeping in his vehicle "many times."

Sholla, her husband and two children lived in a shelter for several weeks following the evacuation.

She said the stress of the sudden move affected her health and that her husband had to leave his part-time job to help care for her.

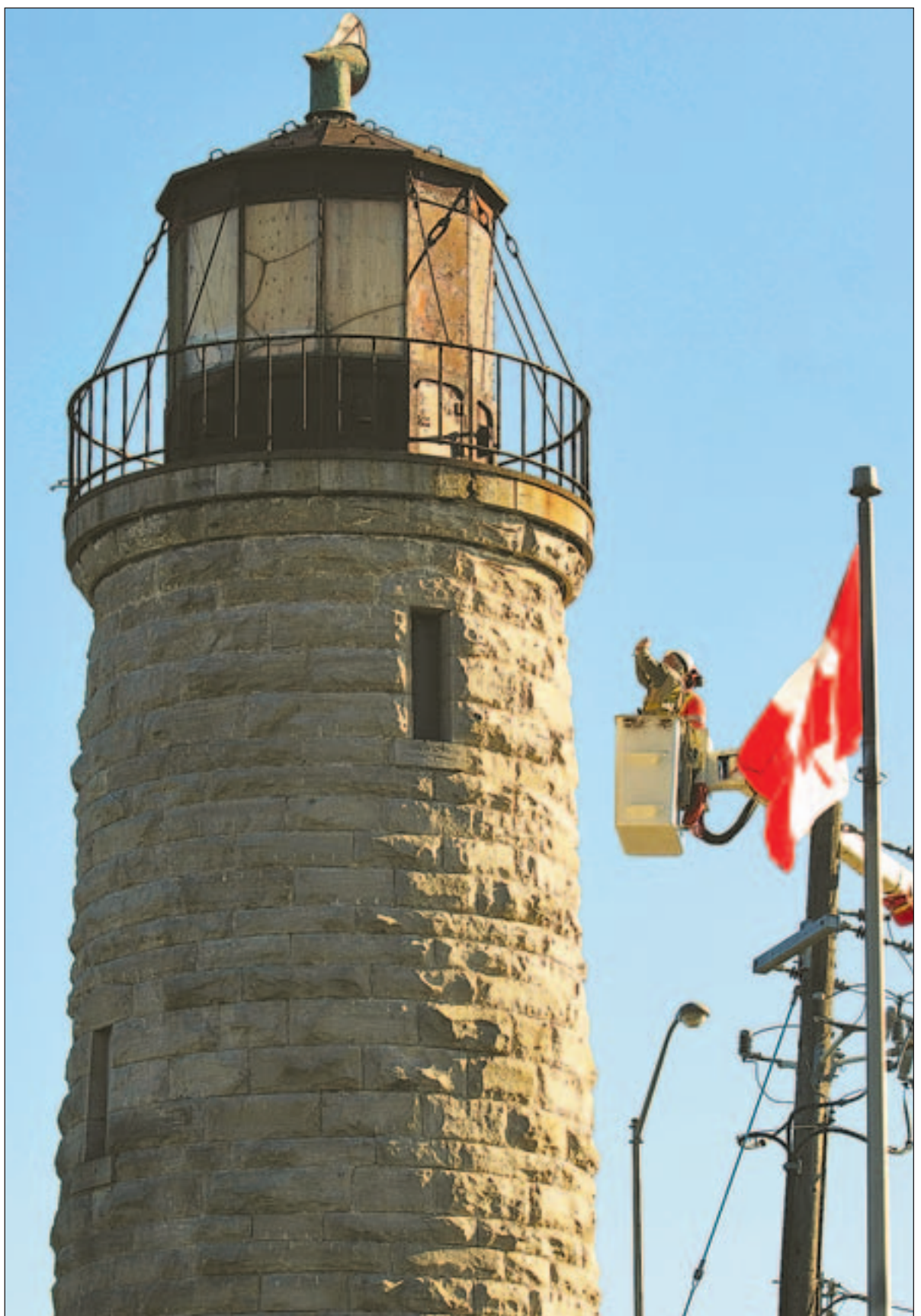
In addition to the tenants' individual claims for compensation, an administrative fine against Creek is also being sought.

Sharon Crowe of Dundurn Community Legal Services, who is representing the tenants, said she is seeking the penalty as a "punishment" and "future deterrent."

The hearing is scheduled to resume Friday morning when Creek's counsel is expected to present his defence.

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ABRD S-EYE VIEW



JOHN RENNISON, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

A bucket truck hoists Chris Borgal (in white hat) to the top of the 55-foot, pre-Confederation limestone lighthouse at the Burlington canal. The Toronto restoration architect is beginning heritage work undertaken by the Beach Canal Lighthouse Group. Yesterday, Borgal inspected the roof, lantern room and stairs of the 1858 lighthouse. He also examine the 1857 lightkeeper's cottage, the oldest building on Hamilton Beach.

City transit workers voting today on whether to strike

BY CARMELA FRAGOMENI

About 60,000 daily city transit riders could soon find themselves stranded if bus drivers vote to strike.

The 610 members of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 107 are voting today on whether to strike.

There is no date proposed yet for the job action.

Local 107 president Budh Dhillon believes that if the result is to strike, the city will likely try to avert it by returning to the bargaining table and attempt again to resolve the issues.

"I hope they will accept the mandate and want to talk again," Dhillon said yesterday.

The Hamilton Street Railway drivers, mechanics and support staff had been

looking for a pay raise above inflation, a washroom downtown and parity with other city staff.

The latest contract talks broke off Friday night after an impasse was reached over various working conditions, according to Dhillon.

City Councillor Sam Merulla, representing Ward 4 in east Hamilton, is urging riders to contact their city

councillor, the mayor, city staff involved and the union to push them to get back to bargaining.

"I see public transit as an essential service," he said. "The most marginalized in our community will be impacted by it, meaning seniors, students and the working poor."

Merulla says there will also be an indirect impact on parents and other

caregivers who will then have to provide transportation.

"It truly will become not only an environmental issue ... but it is obviously going to create havoc in some people's lives. And quality of life will be impacted tremendously!"

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