

■ **EDUCATION:** The group plans to go to Ontario Education Minister Kathleen Wynne

■ **AMAZING TREE**

Alliance steps up battle to save rural schools

CHIP MARTIN

The London Free Press

The new Community Schools Alliance plans to take its campaign to save rural schools right to the door of Ontario Education Minister Kathleen Wynne.

The fledgling organization begun by Middlesex County six weeks ago has asked for a meeting with Wynne at the annual meeting of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) in Ottawa next month.

Southwest Middlesex Mayor Doug Reycraft, a former president of AMO, said the group hopes to find some time with the minister to explain the need to preserve smaller rural schools.

The organization, whose offi-

cial launch is a couple of weeks away, is drumming up support from municipalities across Ontario that feel rural schools, often centres for their communities, are being unfairly targeted for closing by urban-oriented school boards.



Doug Reycraft

A recent study by Karen Aranha of Reycraft's hometown Glencoe concluded rural schools are paying the price for vacant seats in urban schools. Reycraft has suggested rather than close rural schools, more schools should be

consolidated in cities, leading to less dislocation for students.

"We're still creating the foundation of the organization, it's still a work in progress," Reycraft said.

He said as word of the new organization spreads, more municipalities are signing on in a bid to save their schools.

Local politicians and parents complain there's no appeal procedure to fight school closings. They argue it's part of an attack on rural Ontario that also includes cutbacks and bed closures in smaller hospitals.

Chip Martin is a Free Press reporter.

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■ **H1N1:** The big concern is what form the non-conforming virus will take in the coming months

Scientists meeting today to plan for fall flu season

JOHN MINER

The London Free Press

With the H1N1 pandemic virus continuing to spread across Canada and in the London region, 200 scientists are meeting today to compare research notes in preparation for the fall influenza season.

"The big concern is the fall. What will happen to the virus, will it mutate? This is the time to plan," said University of Western Ontario-based Dr. Bhagirath Singh, scientific director of the Canadian Institute of Infection and Immunity.

Influenza normally disappears in the summer, but the H1N1 virus — the so-called swine flu — hasn't shown the typical signs of fading. Some of the people killed by the virus have been healthy adults.

"The situation is we have to look at this carefully and seriously," said Singh, who will speak

at the Toronto meeting.

Canada is now reporting 8,883 laboratory-confirmed cases of H1N1, including 663 hospitalizations and 37 deaths.

Perth County reported its first case Monday, while the Middlesex-London Health Unit has identified 18 lab-confirmed cases and two suspect ones. Other confirmed cases have been reported in Oxford and Huron counties.

"We will be reviewing all of the situation as it stands now in Canada. The hope is we will have a vaccine by fall that will stop this virus in its tracks and there will be no new mutations," said Singh.

The earliest the vaccine is expected to be available in Canada is October, he said.

More than 100 countries have now reported cases of H1N1.

At a meeting last week in Mexico, UWO-trained Dr. Margaret Chan, director-general of the World Health Organization, said there's good reason to believe the

pandemic will be of moderate severity, at least in its early days.

But Chan said the situation needs to be watched carefully during the winter season in the southern hemisphere.

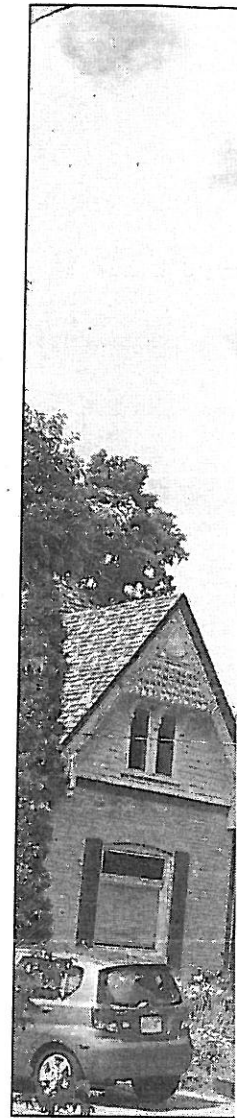
While most cases of severe and fatal infection continue to occur in people with underlying medical conditions, there have been exceptions, she said.

"For reasons that are poorly understood, some deaths are occurring in perfectly healthy young people. Moreover, some patients experience a very rapid clinical deterioration, leading to severe, life-threatening viral pneumonia that requires mechanical ventilation," Chan said.

Cases so far indicate pregnant women are at increased risk of complications.

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This large Silver Maple George (Mooney) Gibbs

Group to go o

CHIP MARTIN

The London Free Press

One was planted in London baseball hero George Gibbs' honor last year. Another was planted recently by a young girl.

Still another, an ancient tree, was reportedly the site of a rendezvous for the Underground Railroad.

Three trees. Three stories. They are among the submissions about trees in the Forest City.

The Amazing Tree project was conducted by Refores-