

Hiding their light under bushels of produce?

Spiritual group quietly does good works

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JENNIFER ENRIGHT

They've been doing their work quietly, so quietly in fact that there is a good chance few people know that the spiritual group known as the Radha Soami Society Beas is a major contributor of fresh produce for local charitable organizations as well as other groups in the area.

During the months from July to October, the Milton group says it produces close to 50,000 lbs of food, most of which is donated to non-profit organizations, agencies and other groups. However, when some people think of the property located at 6566 Sixth Line it's probably not food that comes to mind, but a large structure located on the property.

This structure is currently being used as a bank barn; on a recent tour of the property members were drying vegetables on the main floor and the lower floor was set up as a tractor repair shop.

The group owns two properties south of the Trafalgar Golf and Country Club in Hornby. In late August, the Town of Milton quashed a proposal

by the group to issue a temporary use by-law for a proposal to convert the use of the barn into a study centre, citing concerns about the lack of existing or planned infrastructure, including private servicing, at the property located on the west side of Sixth Line south of Derry Road. Town staff also felt the plan was premature and should wait until a secondary plan is established for the area.

This failed proposal got coverage in the local media, as have others relating to the barn on the group's property, but less coverage has been given to the group's role as providers of food. Part of the problem is that the group prefers to maintain a less public profile, focusing instead on spiritual matters, the study of different spiritual philosophies and projects that benefit the community.

Ever since the group first purchased the property in 1993 there have been concerns raised by local residents and politicians about the barn structure. There were suggestions that the group never intended to use the structure as a barn, but instead always had plans to use it as a spiritual centre in an area that is still zoned for agricultural uses only. However, Ward 1 Milton Councillor Brian Penman, who represents the Sixth

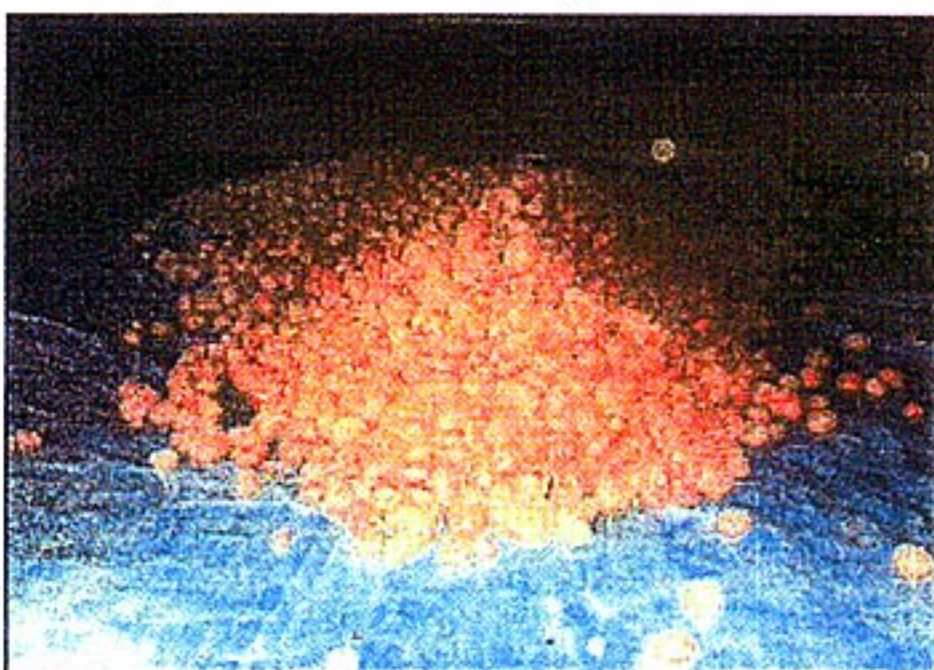
Line area, says the society complied with a ruling the 1990s when the group first applied to convert the barn to a study centre. "They have followed the letter and spirit of the law after their application for a meeting place was denied in the 1990s. And since then in terms of their contribution to the community they have engaged in an annual cleanup of Sixth Line. And they've contacted me in my capacity as chair of Meals on Wheels and sought places where they could distribute the produce that they grow."

The list of food banks, agencies and schools that the non-denominational group supports is long. For the last five

years, the Radha Soami Society Beas has provided food regularly to the House of Friendship, a non-profit organization that covers the Kitchener-Waterloo area. And more recently within Halton Region, the group has provided fresh produce to seven agencies including Transitions for Youth, the Lighthouse Emergency Shelter, Halton

Child and Youth, Halton Women's Place, Hope Place, Halton Recovery House, and Meals on Wheels of Milton.

Another group the Radha Soami Society Beas has assisted is Food for Thought, a non-profit charitable organization that partners with other groups to provide food to school children. Gayle Cruikshank, co-ordinator of Food for Thought, says she would like more farms to donate fresh produce to benefit her program just as the society does. At the moment, the society runs the only farm that provides fresh fruits and veg-



The inside of this large barn is used for storing fruits and vegetables as they dry.



The Radha Soami Society Beas Canada, a non-denominational spiritual organization, owns this property off Sixth Line in Hornby where the group grows produce destined for various community and non-profit organizations in Halton. Members also provide food to Friendship House, an organization that assists various groups in the Kitchener-Waterloo area.

etables to her program. The food from the group's farm is sent to a number of schools in Halton including C. H. Norton Public School in Burlington, Tom Thomson Public School in Burlington, Sam Sherratt Public School in Milton, George Kennedy Public School in Georgetown, and St. Gabriel Catholic School in Burlington.

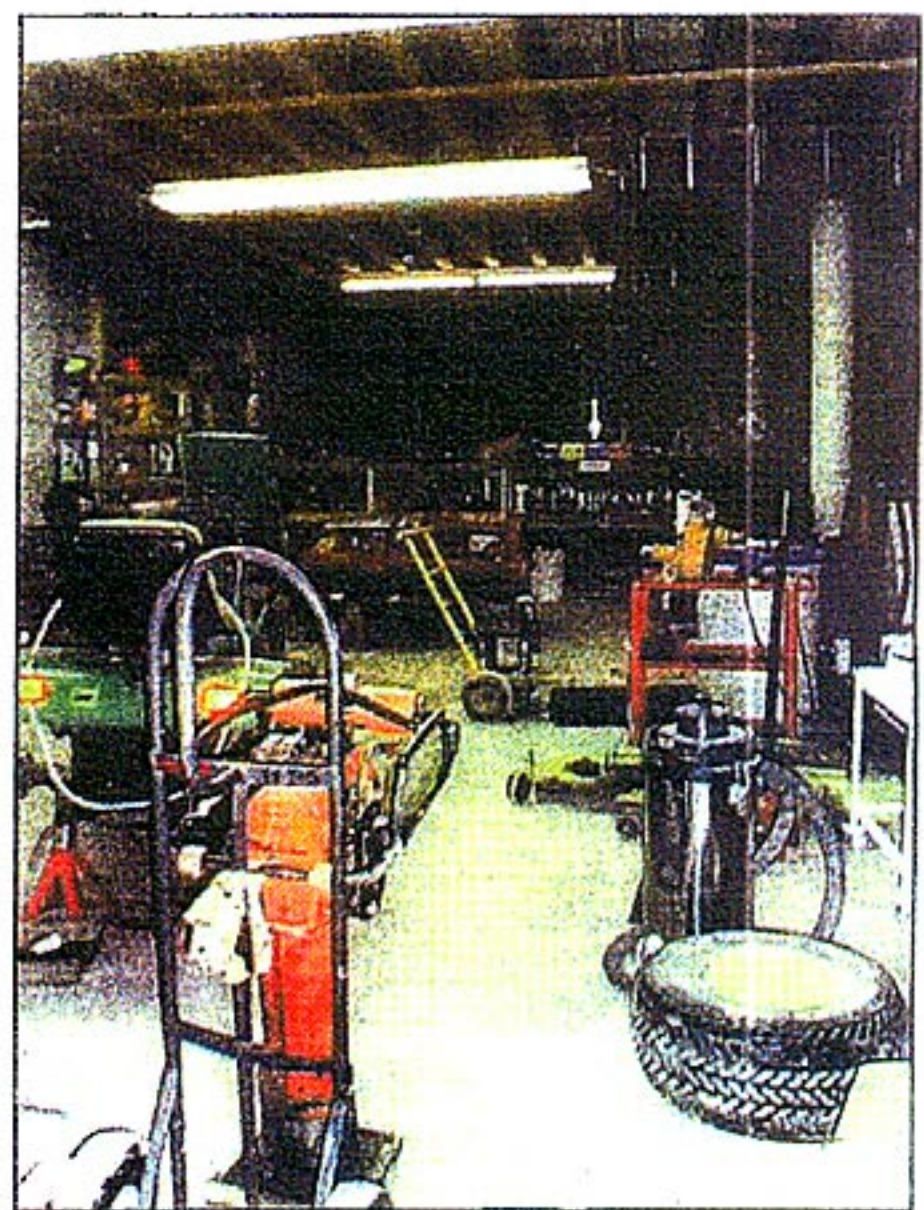
Schools go to the group's property located to pick up produce free of charge: Members grow a variety of produce including carrots, broccoli, onions and other vegetables and fruits. Mrs.

Cruikshank says the work of the society has been "awesome," and the produce they provide is a quality product. "What better food can you find than freshly picked produce?"

Richard Jeffrey, the house coordinator at Recovery House located on

Trafalgar Road, and Mary Cooke, executive director of Meals on Wheels in Milton, agree that the group has benefited both of their organizations.

The Radha Soami Society Beas has provided food to Recovery House since 2003, and Mr. Jeffrey has been very happy with the arrangement worked out between Recovery House and the society. "I find them (the society) to be excellent. Actually, they're very helpful and very friendly, and they approached me about making donations (of food)."



The lower level of the building is used as a maintenance room for repairing machinery used on the property.