

Arts & Craft Sale



Saturday, November 13th, 10a.m.-3p.m.

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School board endangering students say parents

By Sandra Omand
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

Parents of some students attending Montclair School, complain that the 3.2 km. walk puts their children in danger from traffic and strangers

Parents in a north Oakville neighbourhood say the public school board is endangering the lives of their children by using them to fill half empty schools in Halton's older areas.

"I live in fear every day when I send my child off to school," said Catherine Wathen, a stay-at-home mother of four whose 11 year-old daughter walks 3.2 km to Montclair (Grades 6-8) public school. Children in the lower grades are bussed to schools outside their neighbourhoods.

Day-in, day-out, Wathen's daughter, and other neighbourhood children ranging in age from 10 to 13, have to cross the four lanes of Upper Middle Road at Oakmead, where the parents say it is not uncommon to have cars traveling in excess of 90 km/hour.

"It takes forever for the light to change in their favour and when it does they have to run like heck," said Wathen.

The children — against the advice of the school board — then cut through the Sheridan College campus and an isolated tract of woods — recently the site of vio-

lent sexual assaults — in an attempt to shorten the lengthy walk from their homes to school.

Ilona McCoppen, whose 11 year-old daughter walks 3 km to school, said it is not the long walk that concerns parents, but rather the potential dangers posed by speeding traffic and violent offenders.

Fueling parental concern was a recent letter sent home from the school warning about a sexual predator who had committed frightening sexual assaults near Sheridan College — the route their children take to school each day. Although the police quickly apprehended the offender, incidents like this have occurred in the area in the past and parents are worried they could happen again.

"This year, last year and the year before. Every year we hear about sexual predators in and around this area," said Marsha Davies who is concerned about what will happen when her children, now 5 and 8, attend Montclair.

In previous years there were extra seats on the bus that allowed the children, who were within the 3.2 km walking limit set by the board, to be bused but with the rapid growth in the area the buses are now filled to capacity.

Alexandra Lopez-Pacheco who has three children ages 15, 8 and 6, said there is no room on the bus because the board has to bus a huge proportion of Halton's student body "because they haven't built schools where the majority of the kids live."

"If children could walk to local schools busing costs would be reduced," said Lopez-Pacheco. "This is money that could then go back into the classrooms

and directly towards the children's education."

"We are keeping old schools open in mature areas that are under equipped and under utilized and adding portables to these schools to bus children from the newer neighbourhoods," added Davies.

When Davies and Lopez-Pacheco expressed their concerns over the children's safety at an October public school board meeting, they left feeling angry and frustrated.

Trustee Debbie Marklew response was that the children should not be going through the woods as it is not the board approved route (the "approved" route crosses Upper Middle, east to Trafalgar, south to McCraney, then west to Montclair).

Davies, however, pointed out that when faced with a long walk it is natural to seek the shorter distance.

Wathen said for her child to follow the board's route she would have to leave the house at 7:20 a.m., as it is she leaves at 7:40 a.m. to get to school by 8:15 a.m.

"When they leave in the morning during the winter it is dark," said Wathen.

When contacted by the Beaver, Marklew agreed 3.2 km is a long walk but stood firm on her view that it is the parents' responsibility to ensure the children do not cut through the woods.

She also added that she has, in fact, tried "very hard" to find a solution to the problem.

"I had it (the walking limit) reduced to 1.6 km to come in line with the Catholic board but when it came to implement it the cost was too high for the money available," said Marklew.

(See 'Problem' page A5)

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Be A Part of History!

The Town of Oakville is participating in a new initiative entitled RELAY 2000 to officially open the Trans Canada Trail. This event which will be known as the world's longest relay, has participants carrying waters from the three great oceans bordering Canada. In Oakville, 18 water carriers are required to walk, run or wheel their way along a designated route, approximately 1 kilometre, to pass along a knapsack of history to our friends in the neighbouring municipality. It all happens on August 22, 2000!

Interested in participating?

Selection of water carriers is through a lottery system from applicants meeting the December 3, 1999 deadline. Applications and complete Relay 2000 details are available from the Parks and Recreation Department located at the municipal offices, 1225 Trafalgar Road.

The vision for a national, shared-use trail began in 1992 with the formation of the Trans Canada Trail Foundation. Councils have been formed across the country working with municipalities and volunteer groups to build this community linking trail.



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