

Teach young about law lawyer tells conference



JANINE NELLIS gets a candy cane from clown Chris Rivett at the Y after the parade. Balloons were given out, too.

Young people need to have an understanding of how the law operates and how it affects them, and agencies, on the other hand, need to understand the ideas of young people, said Toronto lawyer Marvin Zuker.

Mr. Zuker, also an author and professor of law, gave the keynote address at a conference dealing with youth and the law. The conference, held in Burlington last week, was sponsored by Halton Youth Services Network.

Mr. Zuker charged the study of law has been neglected in schools. Knowledge of the development of laws, operation of the courts, defici-

encies of the system and effect of laws on youth should not be denied young people, especially in Ontario where the age of majority is 18, he said.

In a short but wide-ranging talk Mr. Zuker listed what he believed to be young people's perceptions of what is wrong with the law and commented on children's rights as well.

"There has been an open breach of confidence between adults and young people," said Mr. Zuker, defining youth as those between 14 and 25. "One of the prevailing views of adults has been to wait until young people grow up and conform to them but,

today, young people are not willing to acquiesce to a life style they don't see as valid."

According to the lawyer, some young people don't trust any adults, particularly those in authority. He believes the disintegrating relationship between youth and the law revolves around drugs. "Soft drugs are seen as a legitimate activity among young people. To them it's not a social issue but a private matter," Mr. Zuker commented. "They have the suspicion laws are enacted to prevent pleasurable activities."

He added other perceptions youth hold are that the law is applied

against some sections of society, unevenly in different parts of the country and unethically by some law enforcement people.

Youth are aware their money is sought but their opinions as consumers are not, the lawyer said. Additionally, many believe high school student councils play no significant role and student newspapers are censored.

Turning to the issue of children's rights, Mr. Zuker said a child's legal position is non-existent. In custody cases, the child becomes a chattel. "If children's rights are enacted, adults will be

more accountable to children," the speaker told the audience of about 150, composed largely of young people.

A statement of children's rights must be universally applicable and should not be broken down by age groups, Mr. Zuker went on. The statement should include the rights to food and shelter, to an environment free from physical abuse, to health care, to parental support, to reside with parents unless it is better for the child to live elsewhere, and to be consulted in decisions related to guardianship, custody and determination of status.



HAPPY MOMENT... Stacy Hunter talks to her friend, Santa.

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