

Student studies town

Urge improve landscape to enhance community identity

Acton's community identity could be enhanced through landscape improvements, a University of Guelph student believes. Acton is the subject of landscape architecture student Janice Cervelli's masters thesis and she is spending six months studying the town.

A 23-year-old native of South Bend, Indiana, and graduate of Purdue, she is working on this study in conjunction with the Rural Development Outreach Project. Miss Cervelli's work here began in May as she took walking tours around the town taking photographs.

She has made many enlightening observations about Acton's landscape and come to some conclusions. However, she doesn't want just her ideas in the masters thesis. Miss Cervelli wants to hear what Actonians would like to see in the town and is planning a series of workshops this fall to gather the views of the community.

"Through landscape improvements a town can improve its community identity," she declared in a recent interview.

Houses are an important part of the landscape of a town, and Acton has an interesting mixture, Miss Cervelli feels. She has observed Acton has a variety of older homes filled with character and historical significance, "new picture perfect" single family houses, with well manicured lawns, houses that are 20 to 30 old and have well used lots, developed gardens and outside storage, and high density housing. The housing around the business district is generally in need of repairs and the yards are either uncomfortable or non-existent, according to Miss Cervelli. She has

also noticed a number of houses on Church Street she describes as "deteriorating." "Some areas need rehabilitation in terms of housing," Miss Cervelli stated.

Discussing industry around town she said it is obvious Beardmore takes great pride in its property, but that isn't

the case in the industrial park which she says almost looks like it is unused agricultural land. Around a number of industries there is a lack of buffering or screening so outside storage is an eyesore. There should also be screening along Highway 25 beside the Industrial Park.

Miss Cervelli believes an important landscaping step Acton should take is to have industry directory signs erected in a number of locations so visitors can locate firms.

She finds the entrances to Acton unbelievable. The landscape architecture student says she realizes Acton doesn't exist as a municipality any longer but it is still a community. However, none of the entrances to town welcome visitors to Acton. Something also needs to be done about the large number of signs on the Highway 7 entrance to Acton on the east side, she says.

Miss Cervelli urges improvements be made to the entrance of Prospect Park to make it more attractive and inviting and believes some trees should be placed in the parking lot to eliminate the ugly expanse of asphalt so close to the park entrance.

Playground equipment in Prospect Park and other recreational areas in town is old and worn out and badly needs to be replaced, she notes, and suggests the area across from the senior citizens apartments be better maintained and kept up because it has a tremendous potential for use by residents.

Miss Cervelli is impressed by Fairy Lake and the way parkland wraps around the body water. However, the lake isn't being fully utilized. In her talks with residents she has heard repeated complaints about the lack of boat access to Fairy Lake.

Street lighting in Acton should also be improved and in many areas replaced. For instance in

the Kingham area the street lighting is similar to that used on highways, totally unsuitable for a residential street. On other streets lighting is antiquated.

Some Acton streets are lined with large, lovely, old trees. Unfortunately she observed the newer areas are completely lacking in trees. Some tree planting along Highway 7 and the CNR tracks on the west side of town has been started but needs to be continued.

Actonians seem to be "afraid" to plant trees and shrubs on their property, especially in front yards. Therefore there are many areas of town where there is little or no shade.

School yards on Church Hill Road North and Acton Boulevard are underutilized, Miss Cervelli feels. There are plenty of play areas for children, but nothing for seniors and adults. There isn't even adequate seating for spectators to watch sports and she thinks this should be rectified.

There is a drastic need for more passive parkland in Acton, particularly around the lake she says, as well as in the Bovis and Kingham areas.

Bovis has no parkland, other than the school yards. All Bovis has is a long concrete drainage ditch running through the subdivision, which she describes as a huge mistake.

Kingham is in much the same boat. Nothing except a large swampy area behind the development. Miss Cervelli suggests that area could be developed into a great passive park filled with nature education trails.

Now that she has an idea of the landscape and architecture of Acton she is busy trying to find out how Actonians feel about their surroundings and what they think should be done.

"I've been having informal talks with residents. I'm trying to get their impressions of Acton. I get the feeling there is an inferiority complex here. People

feel their town has a lot of problems. But the look of Acton could occur anywhere. I think Acton has a lot of potential but it just hasn't been developed."

Besides talking to citizens on the street she has interviewed community leaders like Terry Grubbe, Larry Greaves, Paul Neilson and Ted Tyler about Acton and the problems they see here.

She thinks the scope of studies to date have been too narrow. Instead of looking at revitalization of just the downtown, Acton as a whole should be examined and reviewed.

Miss Cervelli will continue talking to as many residents as possible until the fall and then will conduct a number of workshops. These workshops will delve into the landscape

architecture which involves all aspects of the appearance of a community except the insides of buildings.

After consulting with as "wide a spectrum" of residents as possible she will invite about 15 community leaders and representatives of each neighbourhood to a workshop in early October. At this meeting those in attendance will review landscape problems in Acton and list the potential for change in the town.

The next week another workshop will be held devoted to educating those interested about what can be done in Acton, with examples of landscape architecture projects in other small towns, mostly south of the border since not much has been done in this field in Canada.

The third workshop in

October will be a review of the problems and potentials of Acton and an examination of what provincial and community funds are available to solve Acton's problems.

Later Miss Cervelli will produce a small tabloid newspaper as her report on Acton and what can be done here. She hopes to have it distributed to every citizen if she can get funding.

Her main interest in landscape architecture is small community development because it is needed in small towns but isn't being done except in cities that have the money to hire professionals.

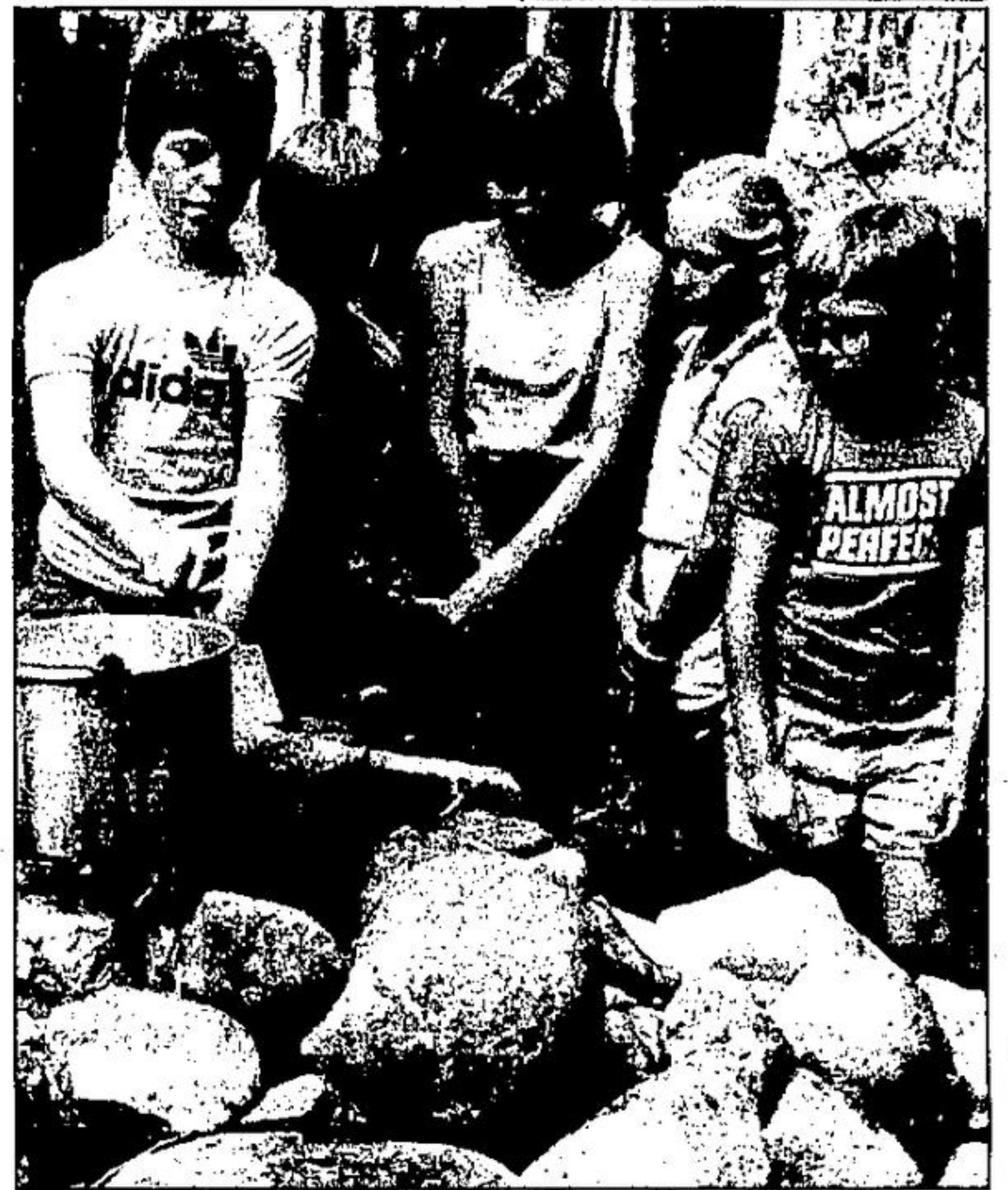
Miss Cervelli asks that any residents or groups wishing to offer input into her study call her at 824-4120 extension 3586 or 821-9495.



Janice Cervelli is studying the landscape of Acton this summer.

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