

HALTON'S PEOPLE

Highland games publicity manager finds relaxation in annual efforts

By MAGGIE HANNAH
Herald staff writer

Although he chuckles about how he was "coerced" into becoming involved with the Speyside Highland Games when they were founded four years ago, Bill Miller of Orchard Boulevard in Georgetown admits he now considers the games and the work he does in helping to prepare for them as part of his relaxation.

"I work just as hard for the games as I do on my daily job," he says, "but the committee as a whole is a pretty hard working bunch. Each member has put in his hours. Officially my title may be publicity director but I think we have a go at everything."

Mr. Miller credits games manager Sandy McAllan of Brampton as being the driving force behind the whole operation and vows that "without him there would literally be no games". It was Mr. McAllan who "coerced" him into working on the games in the beginning and it was largely due to his efforts and enthusiasm that the Speyside games began four years ago.

HELD GAMES

Brampton had highland games for a couple of years but they fell through and in 1978 the Halton-Peel Highland Games Association Ltd. was formed. Members approached council early that year to see if they would be interested in letting the group host the games and if so, would they be prepared to help subsidize them since they were brand new. They were told to go ahead but the request for funds was turned down.

"We were going on a wing and prayer that year," he says, "because we had zero funds but luckily the weather held and we made a little spare cash for the second year. Last year it cost us \$15,000 plus for the games and this year we expect it to cost over \$17,000."

The bulk of this money goes to the Pipers' and Pipe Bands' Association of Canada for prize money, judges, pipers to play for the dancing competitions and transportation costs of bands competing in the events. The Highland Dancers' Association of Canada also has to be paid since it provides judges for the dancing competitions.

"In spite of what some people seem to think it doesn't cost peanuts to put on a show like this," he says. "That's why we have to raise the gate admission to \$3 from \$2.50 last year, because of all the increased costs."

When the games began the only date available which would not conflict with other games happened to be the second weekend of June. Since they were brand new they had no choice but to accept. Now member feel the choice of date has been lucky.

"We're the first outdoor games of the season and dancers and bands are itching to get out and get started," he says. "We're their trial so we get good turn outs."

No one could dispute how good their crowds have been when you consider that inside three years they have come from being a brand new games to tie for third place as the largest games in Ontario. The 1978 program listed 12 other games held between July 1 and Sept. 2. Mr. Miller says the Cambridge games would draw about the same size crowd as Georgetown and only the Fergus games and the Maxville games draw bigger crowds. Both of those games have been running well over 30 years.

Choosing names was done very carefully, Mr. Miller says. The group behind the games decided to use Halton-Peel in their title in order to encompass as large an area as possible and draw on the great number of residents from a Scottish background as well as many local organizations with Scottish connections. Anyone questioning the interest in Scottish traditions in the area has only to stop and count the number of pipe bands in the area, two in Georgetown, one in Acton, one in Milton and the Lorne Scots in Brampton and Georgetown, to realize how wide-spread the connection is.

SPEYSIDE NAME

The name Speyside Highland Games was chosen because regional government turned us into Halton Hills and Halton Hills Highland Games would just have been too much of a mouthful, the group felt. Looking around the area for a logical name to substitute Speyside turned out to be the only old community name with suitable connotations. It was also of special significance to Dr. Alistair MacInloch, the group's president.

Carol Barrow, vice-president, Betty Miller, secretary and Fraser McAllan, treasurer make up the other members of the executive, while George Gray, Beverly Gray, Ab Ten-



Bill Miller (left) looks on as a fellow contestant tets go with a determined heave in the cabre toss.

nant, Peter Barrow and Roy Booth of Georgetown and Frank McBride and George Montgomery of Brampton are the directors of the association.

Gordon Petric, a founding member of the group and last year's treasurer was moved to Phoenix, Arizona by his employers earlier this year but still keeps in touch, Mr. Miller says.

The Speyside games were not Mr. Miller's first involvement with such entertainment. He belonged to an athletic club in his native Perth and attended games all over north-central Scotland with the group for 10 years.

"I was in both gymnastics and weight-lifting," he says, "but not in competitions or things like the heavy weight events."

When the games were set up the group made a conscious choice to avoid midways and frills and stick as close to the traditional type of games found in the highlands as possible. Apparently the choice was good.

"Over and over people tell us 'this is the way it was' when they come to the games," he says. "The heavy weight contestants to a man have stated they like the way we have our games organized. They like the way we've kept to the old traditions and the fact that we give them official recognition for their part in drawing a crowd. There were 10 main heavy weight contestants who have all participated in one of more of the games and we hear that at least five of them will be at the games this year competing in a kiln."

While it takes a degree of expertise to know a top notch dancer or pipe band while they are performing, it requires much less sophistication to follow the contenders in the heavy events. That, combined with the sheer power these men display, make them crowd pleasers as they put the 35 pound shot, toss the 50

pound weight for height over the bar, toss the caber (a telephone pole cut to size), or pick up and carry 400 pound weights in what is called the Farmer's Walk. The only difference in the events will be a change in the weights for the 56-pound weight event.

BIG ENOUGH

"This year the handle will only be big enough for one hand," he says. "In the past they could pick it up with two hands, rock it back and forth to get some momentum going and then heave it over with two hands. But not this year. They'll have to do it all with one hand. That will separate the men from the boys!"

Last year the games drew 27 bands and more than 350 dancers. This year they expect at least an equal number of bands and more than 400 dancers. They have hired two extra judges to handle them all. They also have 50 concessions lined up and Frank McBride is still getting calls from interested groups.

In his capacity as publicity director for the games Mr. Miller has written to the Toronto Sun, the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail as well as to television stations like CFTO. It's little things like the fact that Air Canada will be carrying mention of the Spey-

side games in their magazine for all flights arriving in Canada that indicates just what sort of job he's succeeding in doing for the association and what sort of reputation the games are earning.

Not only has there been considerable interest from outside the community, local merchants and residents have done their part too.

"We feel the games are an asset to the community," he says, "something the community can get involved in. And they have. The merchants and businessmen have been very supportive. The town works crew to date have been more than co-operative. The Hydro does things for us and puts up banners. The papers give us good coverage. We even have individuals involved like Mrs. Herbert on Maple Avenue who rents us her big back yard which adjoins the park as a place to park cars. We give a lot of pleasure to a lot of people and that's what makes it all worth while."

Most of the comments they hear are from people who have enjoyed the colour and the sound but they have had a few anti-ethnic comments from people who feel the games are perpetuating non-Canadian traditions. Not so for Mr. Miller and his wife who arriv-

ed in Barrie in 1963 and came to Georgetown four years later.

CHOOSE CANADA

"We're Canadians by choice. Our kids were born here," he says. "Georgetown's not just a dormitory community for me. Places like Georgetown are the backbone of this country. They're nice places to bring up your kids."

"We were in Canada for eight years before we even named anything Scottish because we wanted to become true Canadians and see if we could fit into Canadian society. It's something you draw upon, these roots. We find the games go far beyond anything ethnic. More and more we find people with names like Brazinsky that haven't a bit of Scottish heritage coming to the games. They enjoy the colour and the sound and where else can you spend a whole day with the sort of entertainment we offer for \$3?"

Local resident will probably look forward to the sight of the Honorary Chieftain for this year's games. It will be mayor Pete Pomeroy, decked for the occasion.

"We felt we owed it to him for his support through his business in former years," Mr. Miller says, "and in recognition of his position. He has promised he will go to a rental place and come in proper attire - with a kiln."

One of the important new events this year will be a dance in the Georgetown Armouries following the game. It is sponsored by the Georgetown Girls' Pipe Band and tickets are available from the band or the association members.

"Eventually we'd like to be able to hold a ball to end the games," he says, "but we were too late starting to organize it this year. We'll have to work up to that."

FOSTER GAMES

The association's aim is to foster the games and make them grow, Mr. Miller says, but ultimately when there is sufficient money in the bank to take care of a rainy day (he means that literally) surplus funds would be put towards support of some cultural activity associated with a Scottish group such as a dance school or a piping school.

"But first we have to get enough money set aside to take care of that rainy day because it's bound to happen some year." Then he grins and reminds you that in all the years and years since the fall fair first started 1977 was the first time it was ever completely rained out so maybe the odds aren't so bad after all.

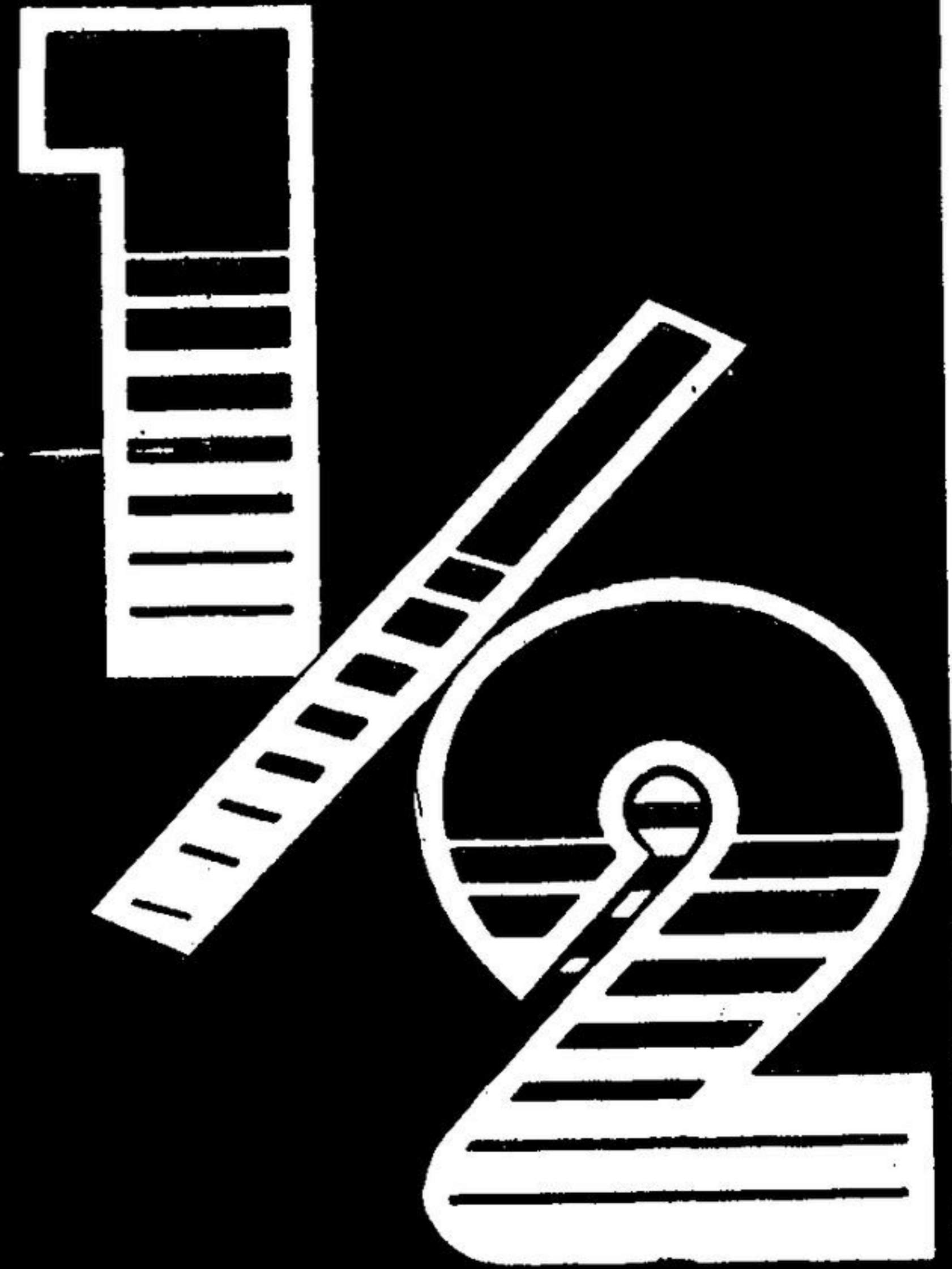
Mr. Miller is Canadian marketing manager for a data processing firm, Harris Systems Ltd. of Don Mills and travels extensively for them. He classes himself as a "lepid" amateur photographer but quickly points out all the possibilities the games present for real enthusiasts both from the standpoint of colour and motion.

His wife, Betty, has been the association's secretary since the beginning and shares the hours of work involved in his "relaxation". Her hobby is horses and he uses that as his excuse to get out in the fresh air, he says.

The couple have two young children, Adrian, 8, and Janet, 5.

SILVER'S Just! Arrived! NEW SHIPMENT OF THIS SEASON'S STYLES

IN OUR



PRICE SHOP

ALL ITEMS HALF MFG. SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE

SHOP EARLY

For

GREAT SELECTIONS

of

KNITTED
SPORTSWEAR

SILVER'S

Polka-Dot Rock
For the man or woman who has everything the IDEAL GIFT
A red and white Polka-Dot Rock. Only \$3.95 (includes postage, handling and pst). Send your cheque or money order, payable to:
THE WOODCHUCK
50 Cordova Ave.
Suite 2501
Islington, Ontario.

framing
SPECIAL OF THE MONTH
Old Family Portraits
20% Off
See our full selection of standard and miniature frames, mats, regular & non-glare glass, Canadian art prints, posters, plaques and originals in oil, acrylics and pen & ink.
"It's worth the drive!"
THE VILLAGE CRAFT & GREENERY SHOP
FOR FINE FRAMING
120 Main St., Erin, Ont. (519)833-9991