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"It's Worth The Drive To Acton"

Paralegals fight for legitimacy

By Mary-Liz Shaw
Herald Special

Robert is standing in front of a black board in Raj Swaminathan's office, a former law enforcement officer with Halton Regional Police, who now runs a Brampton paralegal service.

He is pointing to a rough sketch of an intersection.

"The fight was yellow, so I went through," Robert said. "But when the cop stopped me, he charged me for running a red light."

Robert and others like him are part of a growing number of people taking advantage of a new brand of legal agent operating in Ontario. They are not lawyers but they represent clients in the Province's lower courts, such as Coroner's Court, Provincial Offences Court and Small Claims Court.

Raj Swaminathan is one of about 800 paralegal agents in Ontario. Their popularity with the public for providing cheap, expedient legal services has sparked intense debate in legal circles and they are now the focus of a bill before the Ontario Legislature, introduced by Oakville Progressive Conservative MPP Terry O'Connor.

Bill 42 has already passed second

reading and it is now before the Justice Committee, where it will undergo a clause by clause analysis. Mr. O'Connor, who also sits on the Justice Committee, said his bill's support among many members will ensure its success.

"We're looking at the pay equity bill right now and that is taking up a lot of time," Mr. O'Connor said. "But I'm confident Bill 42 will become law."

Bill 42 proposes that paralegal agents be required to purchase Errors and Omission insurance, that they have a diploma from a community college and that a regulating body be set up to ensure the public is protected from disreputable agents.

Don Knight, the Liberal member for Halton-Burlington, said he supports Bill 42 since it will give legitimacy to a large group of people who have been offering the public a good service for at least four years.

"The bottom line is paralegals do have a place in Ontario's judicial system and the government should protect consumers and reputable paralegal agents," Mr. Knight said.

In the 13 months since he has been operating Ticketts Inc., Mr. Swaminathan said he has lost only two cases. Most cases, he said, cost from \$175 for simple traffic offences to about \$300 for complex cases — such as careless driving charges — requiring more than one court appearance. The average age of his clients is 25-34 years old.

"I spend about eight hours researching a case before I walk into court," he said. "\$200-\$250 is a lot of money to a poor person and he's depending on you to present his case properly. If you don't, you are not doing your job right."

Unlike some paralegal agents, Mr. Swaminathan said he has a good working relationship with most lawyers in Halton. In fact, he keeps a list of about 25 lawyers to whom he can refer a client if he thinks a case is beyond his scope.

"I won't say I'm better than a lawyer," he said. "But in certain areas I am better than some lawyers because they aren't interested in that kind of work."

Mr. Swaminathan also takes small claims cases and unemployment insurance appeals, most of which he does for free, he said.

"Most of those people are out of work and they are incapable of paying me," Mr. Swaminathan said. "But they are my best clients because they tell all their friends how I have helped them."

Mr. Swaminathan's success rate and his case load — his court dates for February 1987 are completely booked — are signals that he is in demand. An Oakville lawyer has written a letter to Attorney General Ian Scott recommending Mr. Swaminathan be a paralegal representative on the proposed regulatory body. He has just opened an office in Toronto and he is looking to open services in Mississauga, Burlington and London.

Mr. Swaminathan said he thinks Bill 42 will bring significant changes to the paralegal profession.

"There'll be more people coming into the business and that's the time I would like to see the government examine paralegals and assess their capabilities."

"The fact is we don't want paralegals who are only in it for the money while the poor citizen is suffering."

Happy New Year



Rallying around the fire department's bell early to welcome in the New Year are children from the Halton Day Care Centre on Maple Avenue in Georgetown. As is the tradition in Halton Hills, bell ringing will bring in the New Year in Acton and Georgetown, Dec.

31 Acton's Town Hall bell will clang, and at the Georgetown Knox Presbyterian Church bells will chime at the stroke of midnight. All are welcome to attend. Hot chocolate will be served at both locations. (Herald photo by Sandy Campbell)

Students adapt to school closings

Students displaced when two Halton Hills schools closed in September are showing how adaptable children can be, according to a recent survey.

The Board of Education survey was answered by Howard Wrigglesworth and Speyside public school students and their parents. According to that survey, 96 per cent of parents and children affected by the closures are happy with their new school.

Their old schools were closed because of declining enrolments. The children from the two closed schools were distributed between seven other schools in Milton and Halton Hills.

A total of 67 children, 54 parents and 31 staff members were surveyed. Most of the children in Grades 4 and 5, 86 per cent of them, look forward to going to their new school, the survey states. The survey shows 94 per cent of transferred children of this age like their new principal.

Children in the primary grades, 1 to 3, are not as easily pleased.

Although 81 per cent of them are happy with their new school, only 61 per cent of them are happy about riding a bus to school. These younger children, at least 89 per cent of them, find their teacher helpful.

Teachers showed they agreed with the primary grade children, busing is the hardest thing for primary students to adjust to. Of staff surveyed, 23 per cent said busing has had a "visible or tangible effect" on transferred students.

Tom Politi was one of the parents from Howard Wrigglesworth school who protested closing Wrigglesworth. He was one of the key members of the Save Our School committee, which appeared before the Board to object to proposed school closings.

Although still upset about the secrecy surrounding the consolidation committee, which recommended schools be closed, Mr. Politi believes transferred students were treated with care and consideration. "I give a lot of credit to the principals and teachers from all the receiving schools," Mr. Politi said.

First a friend says HAC

It's that festive time of year when most of us will be wishing friends and relatives happy New Year in numerous parties throughout the area.

When you have a party, the Hamilton Automobile Club recommends you give your guests the gift of friendship by considering those that must drive home.

Recognizing that it's impractical to discourage drinking altogether especially during the New Year's season, the Club says, as a host, you morally are responsible for the safety of your guests.

Low key methods of de-emphasizing the liquor should not dampen the spirits of the party.

The basic point is to simply center attention on food and fun rather than the bottled spirits.

Here are some suggestions for party hosting:

—If you serve alcoholic drinks, make non-alcoholic punches and non-alcoholic beverages available and make certain that everyone knows of the alternatives.

—As guests arrive for your party, encourage one person in each couple or group to be the designated driver, and thereby assure a safe ride home for your guests. If necessary, provide a gift for the designated driver as an incentive.

—Prove your lavishness and creativity as a host with a tempting display of food. Offer new foods throughout the evening. Walk around the room with menu additions. Avoid highly seasoned or salty foods or snacks, as these merely make your guests thirsty.

—Use "normal" one ounce portions of liquor, or less, in mixed drinks — don't mix "strong" or "stiff" drinks.

—Serve your guests only upon request — or have a self-serve bar so guests may pace themselves.

—Center the attention on food. Have an attractive and generous display of rich and starchy foods and serve plenty of them throughout the evening.

—As the evening wears on, serve rich dessert or sweets along with a non-alcoholic punch or beverage. Sweets aren't too compatible with alcohol and may lead a friend to choose coffee instead.

—Start putting the alcoholic beverages away at least an hour before people are expected to leave.

—Don't let your friends break the law...make passengers out of driving guests who may have had one too many. Consider calling a cab, or if all else fails, offer the guest overnight accommodation.

—Remember, the success of your party is that everyone gets home safely.

PEACE GAMES

Students survive nuclear tragedy

By SANDY CAMPBELL

The time is the future. The place is a world devastated by nuclear war. The task is for survivors to create a plan which will prevent another nuclear tragedy.

That was the task put to Halton Grade 12 students for a Halton Board of Education course operated with the help of McMaster University professors. The course, called a McMaster Symposium, was for Halton students with above average interest and ability, said Suzi Beber, Acton High School's head of special education.

A plan, created through the combined efforts of Acton High School and Georgetown District High School, was picked best of four plans presented. "The team effort, more than anything, showed that Acton and Georgetown can work together," Ms. Beber said. Gifted students from ten Halton high schools have been working together on the course all term. They met weekly since September at J.W. Singleton Education Centre in Burlington.

They received instruction from university professors and discussed readings in the humanities, social sciences and pure and applied sciences, Ms. Beber said. The theme of those lectures and discussions was, "Technology: Our Servant or Our Master?"

The course climaxed Dec. 4, when four teams from ten high schools presented their plans to save the world. Listening and judging those plans was "the world-wide council" made up of teachers. In 15 minutes, using information they learned throughout the term, each group made their pitch to the council.

Georgetown and Acton high schools were the fourth group to present. As a group they were considered the world's philosophers, and were asked to design a plan focusing on political structures and utopian literature.

Dressed in monk robes, and burning incense, the Halton Hills contingent won over the world-wide council, the teachers. Sticking to the topic and giving a clear presentation helped them win, Ms. Beber said.

Although it was not a competition, beating the other teams was an incentive to try harder, said Charlie Gibbs, a student from Georgetown and District High School. Mr. Gibbs described the course "as one that prepares you for university."

He said he learned a great deal from the course. Another course might teach more concrete facts, but the McMaster Symposium taught students about working as a team, he said.

Because the course dealt with so many topics in the arts and sciences, it will help students make career decisions, Ms. Beber said. Other assets of the course were team building and problem solving, she said.

Students are grouped on a journal they kept, the group project and their participation, and an independent research project. Charlie Gibbs plans to do a slide show on the history of technology for his research project.

The course created for the Halton Board of Education was developed

In 1984, this is the first year schools from the north participated, Ms. Beber said.

The teacher in charge of the Georgetown students is Isabel Thompson.



PEACE GAMES—These Grade 12 Acton High School students collaborated with Georgetown high students in a course involving all Halton's high schools. The collaboration of Halton Hills high schools received top marks of all



PEACE MAKERS—These Grade 12 Georgetown students were five of the seven Georgetown students taking part in the McMaster Symposium on peace. They collaborated with six Acton High School students and received the highest marks of

ten schools taking part. Seen here are (back left to right) Bob Sun, Jim Clark, Charlie Gibbs, (front) Naomi Matsuura and Natalie Whiting. Missing are Jana Seel, Tanya Morrow and their supervisor Isabel Thompson. (Herald photo)



Raj Swaminathan is one of about 800 paralegal agents in Ontario. Paralegals are the focus of a bill before the Ontario Legislature, introduced by Oakville MPP Terry O'Connor. (Photo by Mary-Liz Shaw)

In the hills

Christmas baby

There was a Halton Hills Christmas baby. Paul Dods, weighing 7.7 pounds was born Christmas Day at Guelph General Hospital at 10:37 a.m.

It was the nicest gift parents Allan and Anne-Marie Dods of Limehouse could have asked for at Christmas.

Grandteachers talk

"Grandteachers" or "Seniors in the Community" will be the topic of the next University Women's Club meeting. Margaret Dewdney will speak at Centennial Public School on January 6 at 8:45 p.m. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Bids accepted

Town council has accepted the proposal of R. F. Winter and Associates in conjunction with the Institute of Environmental Research Incorporated to do the arena feasibility study. Proposals were submitted by seven firms and the winning bid will cost the town \$23,900 for the two-phase study.

The steering committee has been named and will consist of Mayor Russ Miller, Councillors Rick Bonnette, Betty Fisher, Marilyn Serjeantson and Peter Norton, clerk-administrator Joe Simon, parks and recreation director Tom Shepard, facilities superintendent Al Hay and a representative of the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation. —Courtesy Guelph Mercury

Come ring in the New Year

Come, ring in the new year with fellow townspeople Dec. 31. In Georgetown, you're invited to Knox Presbyterian Church where Rev. Peter Barrow will clang the bells on the stroke of midnight.

In Acton, you're invited to the Acton Town Hall where Acton Legion members will be ringing in the new year. The Legion was selected citizen of the year this year by the Acton Chamber of Commerce.

In both Acton and Georgetown locations, there'll be hot chocolate to warm up the tootles and balloons for the kiddies who managed to stay awake. Everyone's welcome.

Single parents meet

Are you a single parent interested in attending family activities, dances, discussions? Come to Brampton Parents Without Partners membership information meeting Jan. 15, 7:30 p.m. For information call Pauline 791-9047 or Colette 456-2962.

Adult skating

Don't miss this opportunity to learn or improve your skating in a small group setting. Lessons begin on Wednesday, January 7 from 7 to 7:50 p.m. at the Memorial Arena. Please call 877-5185 ext. 269 for more information.