

Features

Acton students reaching out to the world

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT
The Herald

Canadian Geography classes at Acton High School have gone far beyond the science that describes the surface of the earth. They've become 70 minute conference periods where students from around the world debate environmental, business and political issues through a computer link-up.

It's called computer teleconferencing and has 31 Acton students discussing the politics of global warming, human rights, arms control, drug trafficking and the European Economic Community from a Canadian perspective with students around the world who discuss the same issues from their countries perspective.

"It's a great way to make Social Science more relevant to kids," said Al Finlayson, a Social Science consultant who is working with school staff to incorporate the project. "Instead of teaching them a pile of facts, it teaches them to research and accumulate information as problem solvers."

The actual conferencing part of the course takes place in the computer lab. Two computers have been linked to the University of Maryland, U.S.A., where the program is based. Messages from students representing 22 countries are sent there via satellite technology and translated, if

needed, by Maryland University students and sent on to the school representing the country the message is directed to. Although 22 countries are represented, only Spain, Brazil, Japan, Zimbabwe, Germany, United States and Canada are actually represented by students of their own country. Other countries are represented by other Canadian or American school students.

Before the teleconferencing began two weeks ago, there was a tremendous amount of advance preparation by students, said Keith Black, teacher of the OAC course at Acton High School who was instrumental in administering the program.

He explained the class has been organized to represent the Canadian government with a Prime Minister (Colleen Gregg), Deputy Prime Minister (Andrew McVay), Minister of Communications (Scott Pearson) and committee members. Along with researching their role, each student was assigned a country and were required to know the countries policies on the environment, business and human rights.

The interaction occurs when a communication is established with a specific country, for example, Japan. The student who has the expertise on that country can then be consulted.

As well, each student must have a basic understanding of Canada's own policies in order to



Acton High School student, Dan Argudin, accepts a computer message from Japan during the school's conference on the environment while Craig Jones looks on. The school is taking part in a com-

puter teleconferencing program where students across the world represent their country on political issues and review, debate and discuss these issues through a computer linkage. (Herald photo)

represent the country during the computer conferences.

"The research has helped to broaden the student's cultural and political horizons," said Mr. Black. "It's also aided in enriching their understanding of at least 22 countries in the world."

He explained that students garner much of their information from magazines because they are more current on issues. "They must have an intense understanding of Canada. If they don't, they're seen as weak, by the representatives of other countries and by their own peer group," he said.

He added this is a good thing because it makes the students "reach a bit" and doesn't allow them to slide by with a minimal level of understanding about the countries - including Canada - involved in the program.

Through still in its early stages, the school is finding the program very successful and has even been commended by the University of Maryland on the quality of the messages being sent out by the Acton students.

During one teleconference session, students received 100 messages from other countries.

Student Scott Pearson said he finds the conferencing "really interesting" and enjoys it because it's a different way of learning.

Andrew McVay said he has gotten a whole new respect for other countries through the project.

All the teachers and administrators involved with the project are raving about the computer concept as well.

"Not only does the program help students learn about other countries, but it builds up people and computer skills," said Mr. Finlayson.

Besides Mr. Finlayson and Mr. Black, the persons responsible for establishing the computer teleconferencing at Acton High School include; George Monroe, co-ordinator for Social Science for the Halton Board of Education; George McCrae, head of computer services for the Board; Damian Cooper, instructional consultant with the Board; Ozzie Calderelli, Principal at Acton High School; Bill Taylor, computer programmer at the school; Dave Sale, head of computer services at the school, and Ken Ellis, head-of the resource centre at the school.

Teleconferencing will continue until the end of June when students will be required to write a paper on Canada's links to other countries and what issues Canada is resolved and unresolved on.

Kavanaugh family wondering what the future holds

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT
The Herald

The eviction deadline for Willow Park residents has come and gone but for the Kavanaugh family, the day's ominous overtones were overshadowed by worse news. Their six-year-old son Alex, who has leukemia, was ordered back to hospital.

Their son, who is recovering from chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant, was transfer-

red to Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children after he began urinating blood Tuesday. The brave youngster had tried to hide this fact from his family because he didn't want to go back to hospital. Fortunately, he was able to come home again that night. Doctors believe the bleeding may be a delayed reaction to the chemotherapy treatment.

It's their concern for Alex's health that keeps Bernadene and

Paul Kavanaugh fighting against the Credit Valley Conservation Authority, and local councillors, against the CVCA's expropriation of the land Willow Park is situated on.

The CVCA expropriated the land in 1988 because it's located in the Credit River flood plain putting the resident's lives at risk should a flood occur.

Despite this danger, Mrs.

Kavanaugh insists this is the safest place for Alex who is immune deficient.

"Alex can't be near animals or children who are sick," she said. "If we were to move, we'd have to thoroughly clean the place and then be sure Alex isn't exposed to other people or their pets." She said that isn't a danger in the trailer park because everybody knows Alex and knows how to take care of him.

"I know Alex is safe here with these people," she said.

Even if the Kavanaugh's could move to a 'safe' place, Mrs. Kavanaugh said they just can't afford it. She and her husband are barely making ends meet now, having to pay a \$575 monthly mortgage since Mr. Kavanaugh was laid-off from his job at Cobra Manufacturing in January.

"How could we afford to pay rent on top of that?" she asks.

Realistically, Mrs. Kavanaugh knows she will have to move but she said she won't until she receives fair compensation.

"I'd be happy if we got the money to pay off our mortgage

and the interest we've paid on it over the years. Also we would like someone to find us a new site so we would have a place to live," she said.

So far, the Kavanaugh's have been given \$6,200 from the CVCA for moving costs and to cover improvements they have made on their property. Without a site to place the trailer, its virtually worthless even though they paid \$21,500 for it five years ago.

"You think when you own something, it's yours," she said. "Then all of a sudden they take it away from you and it scares you. All of a sudden you feel like a criminal when you haven't done anything."

Now, the family is waiting for two things. First they hope their son will fully recover and secondly, they're waiting to see what will happen to their home.

They know they'll eventually be kicked out of Willow Park but they don't know how or when it will happen.

Worst of all, they don't know what will happen to them when that day finally comes.



Bernadene Kavanaugh and her two younger children, Paula and Joel, played with Tonka Toys outside their Willow Park trailer, while Bernadene waited for a telephone call from the hospital where Mr. Kavanaugh and son Alex, who has leukemia,

were Tuesday after Alex experienced complications. The family is together at home now but still worry about Alex and where they will be living in the future. (Herald photo)

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