



Acton High School student Matthew Fleet is an A-level student who's planning to enter university this fall to become a teacher. But because he's partially paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair, he won't be able to unless a recently-formed group, the 'Wheels for Matthew Committee' is able to raise \$20,000 to purchase a modified van for him to drive. (Herald Photo)

## Acton High School student reaching for the top

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT  
The Herald

Matthew Fleet dreams of going to University to become a teacher but because he's partially paralyzed, his immobility is threatening that dream.

But thanks to a newly-created community project known as the "Wheels for Matthew Committee", his dream may come true.

The committee began meeting in January to plan fundraising events in the hopes it can raise \$20,000 from the community in order to buy 19-year-old Matthew a special van. If they can raise this money within the community, a government program, "Vocational Rehabilitative Services" will cover the cost (an estimated \$20,000) of modifying the van to suit Matthew's needs.

It will mean a whole new life for Matthew who, since 1988, has been confined to a wheelchair. That year, he and his family went vacationing in the Dominican Republic during the Christmas holidays.

An athletic and adroit swimmer, Matthew was out body-surfing and in a bizarre twist of fate, he dove into a wave and was washed up on shore partially paralyzed.

Matthew doesn't know if he hit the bottom or if the strength of the wave twisted his spinal chord but as a result of the dive, a chip of bone dislodged in his body, became pressed into his spinal chord and

impaired his ability to move certain muscles in his arms and legs.

He was in the hospital for a year recovering but returned to school in a wheelchair to complete his studies and graduate with his Grade 12 class.

He's now an A-level OAC student at Acton High School.

Says Matthew, "with an accident like this, half the battle is accepting the disability and the other half is overcoming the barriers that relate to it."

He's won half the battle but is still fighting to overcome barriers, particularly ones that hamper his mobility.

Thanks to help from teachers, students, and a Garventa machine (a wheelchair lift), Matthew is able to manoeuvre around the school and get to his classes.

But without aid, the weakened and paralyzed tricep muscles (back of the arm muscles) in his arms aren't powerful enough to propel him up steep ramps, over snowy or rough roads, over roadside curbs or stairs.

"I can't go anywhere or do anything on my own anymore," he said. "A van could provide the freedom that has been taken away from me."

"With a van, I could participate in so many other things again and would be able to interact with the community again," he continued. "Having mobility would help me regain my self-confidence and self-esteem because I'd be more independent."

Now, he relies on Activan for transportation which has limited hours. The hours aren't flexible enough to allow him to maintain a part-time job or perform any volunteer work; something he was very involved in before the accident. He had to give up two chances for summer employment-not because he isn't capable of handling a job, but because he had no means of transportation to get to work everyday.

Worst of all, without a van, he can't get to a university to further his studies as there is no commuting-service for handicapped persons which provides such far-reaching service.

Soon, he may no longer have to worry about this anymore if the 'Wheels for Matthew Committee' can raise the \$20,000 to purchase the van.

They hope to raise this money through donations and fund-raising events. Three have already been scheduled. They include; A Winter Carnival to be held Feb. 24-29; A Gigantic Garage Sale to be held May 2 and a 50's and 60's combination car show and dance to be held in early June.

Locations and times for the events have not been scheduled but the Halton Hills Herald will keep readers updated on the fund-raising events.

Anyone interested in contributing to the 'Wheels for Matthew Committee' or anyone who has questions can contact Dave Boycott at 853-2920.

## Student needs a priority in Halton school system

BY BRYN DAVIES  
Principal, GDHS  
Herald Special

With the economy in recession there has been an increase in media scrutiny of the educational system.

A recent Statistics Canada survey indicated that one out of every four unemployed people under the age of 24 have not finished high school. This compares with about one in five high school graduates and one in ten college or university grads who are also unemployed.

It is also commonly believed that about 30 per cent of Ontario's high school students drop out before earning their diploma.

The logical conclusion to this data is that our young people must stay in school if they are to increase their chances for employment in an increasingly competitive world.

Our school board recently reported that Halton's drop out rate is approximately 5 per cent. This is an outstanding achievement.

While it may be argued that more and more young people are returning to school to improve their employability skills, it should be noted that our retention rates have improved about 2 per cent since the beginning of the recession.

I believe the overwhelming reason for our success is the careful planning and hard work of our staff. The Board has been proactive in systematically pursuing a Retention Strategy.

At Georgetown, our school-based social worker has been busy dealing with community and family concerns that might affect a student's commitment.

We also offer a special program that allows students to complete credits that have only been partially completed the previous semester.

We offer a variety of support groups to help students problem solve and make more effective decisions.

Our new Grade 9 mentor program this year linked up senior students with Grade 9 students to help them begin their high school careers on a positive note.

We have another group of teachers called the Teachers' Network that meets monthly to discuss strategies to help better meet the classroom needs of our students.

We offer 33 different team sports throughout the year, involving over fifty adults and hundreds of students. The research tells us that student retention is increased when students are involved in a co-curricular commitment.

Very often their coaches or club advisors become the key adults in their lives who encourage them to "stick with it".

I believe this is a "good news" message that our community needs to hear. Our success in Halton, and in Georgetown, in keeping our kids in school is part of our over-all strategy to meet the varying and complex needs of our student population.

## School hall passes under the gun

By FLAVIA TESTA  
Herald Special

After a week of holidays it is hard to adjust back to the school. But duty calls and we are all back for another semester of hard work! (right?)

Semester two has begun and with it came a little change that I should like to bring to your attention. The GREEN CARD. A little piece of neon green laminated paper that permits students to be in the halls of the school. That's right, Hall Passes. So what do you think of that? This is quite a change, so I have interviewed a number of students and I also received some input from teachers regarding this issue.

Let us understand first of all where this idea of the "hall pass" comes from. Well we can thank our American neighbors for one thing. Hall passes were distributed among many high schools in the United States. The purpose of these passes was to minimize disturbances in the school, not only in the classroom but also to avoid conflicts between students, I assume they mean (fights). Not a bad idea, considering the size of most schools in the U.S. and the problems they have had among gangs etc.

The idea would be to control the number of students that roam the hallways without legitimate reasons. All in all this seems to make sense, but has it worked? Hard to tell, let's just say that it has helped.

So why bring the "hall pass" to

littl' ol' Georgetown? As most students can confirm there are quite a number of people who roam about the hallways. But isn't that to be expected in a high school?

Administration says the Green Card has been created in order to control and minimize the number of students that are in the halls. Not a bad idea, I think we can all agree. Each classroom has two cards and every time a student wishes to leave the room he must carry out a green card.

What are the down sides to this issue? Most teachers feel this method is silly and pointless. They look at the passes and laugh, as if to say "what will they think of next?" If you think about it, nothing has really changed with these hall passes. Teachers controlled the number of students that left the classroom, only there were not any green cards. The number of students who do not have classes obviously could not have been controlled then, and they cannot be controlled now because they do not have a class in which to obtain a hall pass.

The Green Card is a short term solution to a long term problem. But I ask you does it seem natural to walk into a school and have no students in sight?

I'm not saying that should be crowds of people just standing about in the school but it is nice to see that there is life in such a building.

Like the U.S. like Canada? Let's see what happens.

## School board honored for United Way work

The employees of the Halton Board of Education have rallied to support United Way, setting an all time record for the Education sector of Burlington, Hamilton-Wentworth.

The Halton Public Board of Education has raised an amazing 13.5. more this year compared to the previous 1990 campaign! Despite the tough economic times, there were also 13.7. new contributors to the campaign!

Under the direction of Bert O'Hearn, Vice-Principal of Acton District High School and Volunteer Campaign Coordinator and Bob Williams, Director of Education, employees of the Halton Board of Education have set a record for the largest donation from the education sector to United Way--a record that shows their caring for more than 1 in 4 people in our community who use United Way services. Their donations will actually help thousands of people who will use the numerous services offered by United Way's agencies.

The 1991 United Way Team for the Halton Board of Education will be recognized at the Board meeting Thursday (tomorrow) at the Halton Board of Education at 8:00 p.m.



## How to buy a computer

Georgetown District High School is the place to find out the difference between IBM compatible computers and Macintosh computers. Both will be set up for you to try for yourself, along with a workshop explaining about the different software and hardware needed to get started at home. Confused about how much to spend or whether to spend at all? This session will answer all of those questions and more. The date is Saturday, February 15, 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., price \$26.54. Register by Visa or Mastercard by calling 333-2755 or for more information call 333-3499.