

Sarah Hobbs is this week's winner of two passes to Wild Water Kingdom, compliments of The Independent/Free Press after being chosen for the Customer Service Award with the Halton Hills Recreation Department. Sarah spends a lot of time with the Musical Theatre camp, conducted at John Elliott Theatre, and was also recognized for her work at the recent carnival in Acton.

TED BROWN Halton Hills Weekend

## Technology pushes workers into literacy guild program

By KAREN SMITH

This story is about people who may never be able to read it.

One in four residents of Ontario are functionally illiterate, says a spokesperson for the North Halton Literacy Guild.

That means 25 per cent of the population have problems with everyday activities which most people take for granted - reading a newspaper or a menu in a restaurant.

With the onslaught of new technology, updated reading, writing, and mathematical skills are essential in the workplace. That's where the North Halton Literacy Guild comes in.

For the last two years, the organization has run the Workplace Literacy Program - a cooperative effort between the Guild, the company, and both provincial and federal governments.

"As I worked, I seen myself climbing up the ladder," said one student. "And I thought I'd better get myself organized here or I'd be in trouble later on. "The Workplace Literacy Program provides private tutors for employees in need. Tutors come from a variety of age groups and backgrounds.

While the company is asked to donate \$475 per student to the Guild, the service is free to employees.

Roxul Inc., a Milton manufacturer of insulation, is a proud participant, said Karen Bongard, co-

ordinator of the program. The local plant on Harrop Drive and the Energy and Chemical Workers Union worked together on the ini-

Since climbing on board, tutors have helped about 20 workers improve their reading, writing and mathematical skills to meet the needs of the "high technology plant," Bongard added.

She also pointed out that average students don't "sign their name with an X." Most participants have knowledge of reading and writing, but need to brush

To be eligible for the program, employees must be at least 16 years of age and out of school. A private interview is conducted by the Guild with the employee to determine his or her needs.

North Halton companies have been the main focus in the program to date, but Bongard said she plans to approach small businesses to request their participa-

"I have a little daughter who's eight now," said another student. "And she is in Grade 3, Kimmy. You see, Kimmy is having trouble reading, too. I understand her frustration, her hurt, so I sit with her sometimes at night and we

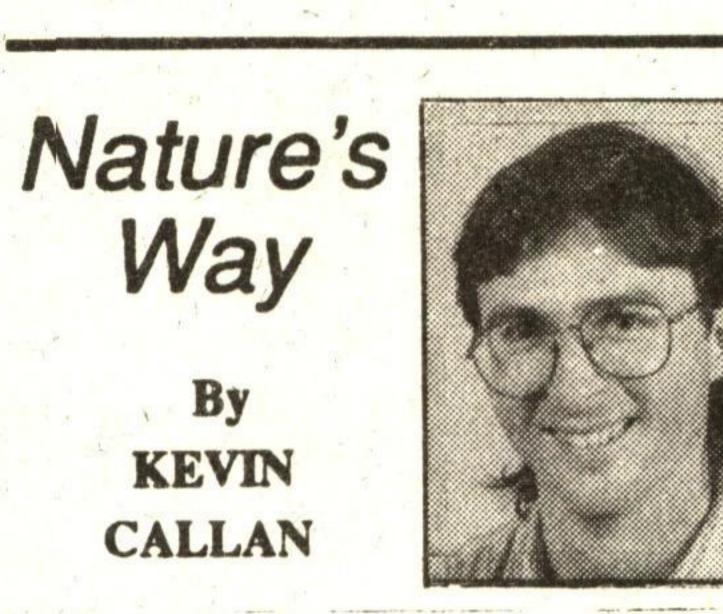
For more information about the Workplace Literacy Program, call the North Halton Literacy Guild at 873-2200 or 876-4756.

## A walk with the snake lady rattles Kevin

G. Herbert Lash, in his book 'A Walk In The Forest' states, "It is reasonable to say, however, that the chances of winning a rich sweepstake are far greater than those of accidently encountering a poisonous snake in a Canadian forest."

Well Herbert, I've never come close to winning a lottery in my life, but last weekend my left foot encountered a poisonous Massasauga rattlesnake buzzing its tail just inches away! And ever since the million to one incident I've been buying up sweepstake tickets everywhere I go.

I was visiting an old friend of mine, Dave Parsons, on Beausoleil Island, when my luck changed for the worse. Dave works as a Nature Interpreter for the Georgian Bay National Park system and had asked me to give a presentation on Killarney on the island. After the show Friday night, Vickey, one of the park wardens, called from the maintenance barn to tell us that one of the captured rattlesnakes was about to give birth. All the interpreters and I rushed over to the "snake room"



in time to watch the birth of eight bouncing baby rattlers.

After we passed around cigars, Vickey, the snake lady, showed me two other Massasaugas which were captured on one of the campsites that day. She was planning to release them the next day, after she had placed a small transmitter inside each snake to keep an eye on their movements. Well, being a crazed photographer I couldn't resist the great photo opportunity, so I asked Vickey if I could tag along.

After breakfast Vickey met me at the maintenance barn. She loaded the box of snakes in the truck while I loaded my camera equipment, and away

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we went. On our way to the north side of the island I asked Vickey of the chances of meeting a rattler while hiking in the park. She comforted my phobia by saying that through her travels through the park all summer she would be lucky to come across more than one or two Massasaugas.

Thinking that there was 70 to 200 rattle snakes on the 28 kilometre long island I was quite relaxed when Vickey and I exited the truck and walked off the road into prime rattlesnake

Then, as Vickey began to unlatch the lid of the snake box and the two snakes began to buzz their tails, my aversion returned and I began to perspire and shake uncontrollably. As I stepped back from the box I suddenly heard a third rattle and to my horror I discovered another rattlesnake inches from my left foot, curled up in a defence position. I quickly jumped up on a rock outcrop and screamed out "here's another one for ya Vickey!"

After Vickey had released the

two snakes in the box and captured the one I nearly stepped on and I took an entire roll of film with the aid of my largest zoom lens, I quickly tiptoed from the snake-infested area and jumped into the truck, checking under the seat like a young boy looks under his bed at night for imaginary monsters.

Thinking back to the encounter now however, I've come to realize that one has to literally step on a Massasauga rattle snake to be bit. In fact, only two people in Eastern Canada have ever died from a Massasauga bite - neither received proper treatment.

I think the phobia of snakes are more in one's mind. remember driving back from the release site with Vickey and spotting a group of hikers headed towards the area. Vickey simply waved hello and drove on. I asked her why she didn't warn them of snakes in the area and she simply replied, "what they don't know won't hurt them; besides Kevin no one can be as lucky as you."

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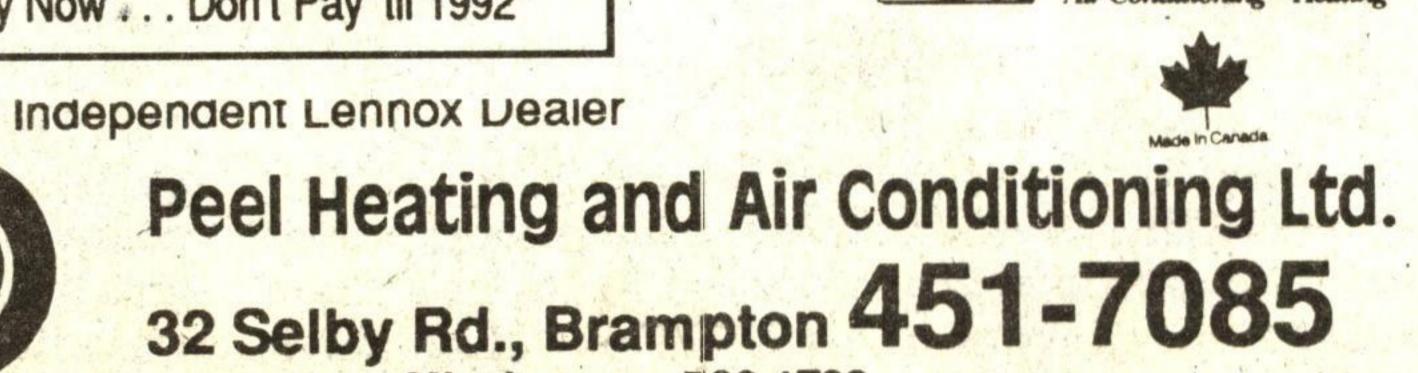
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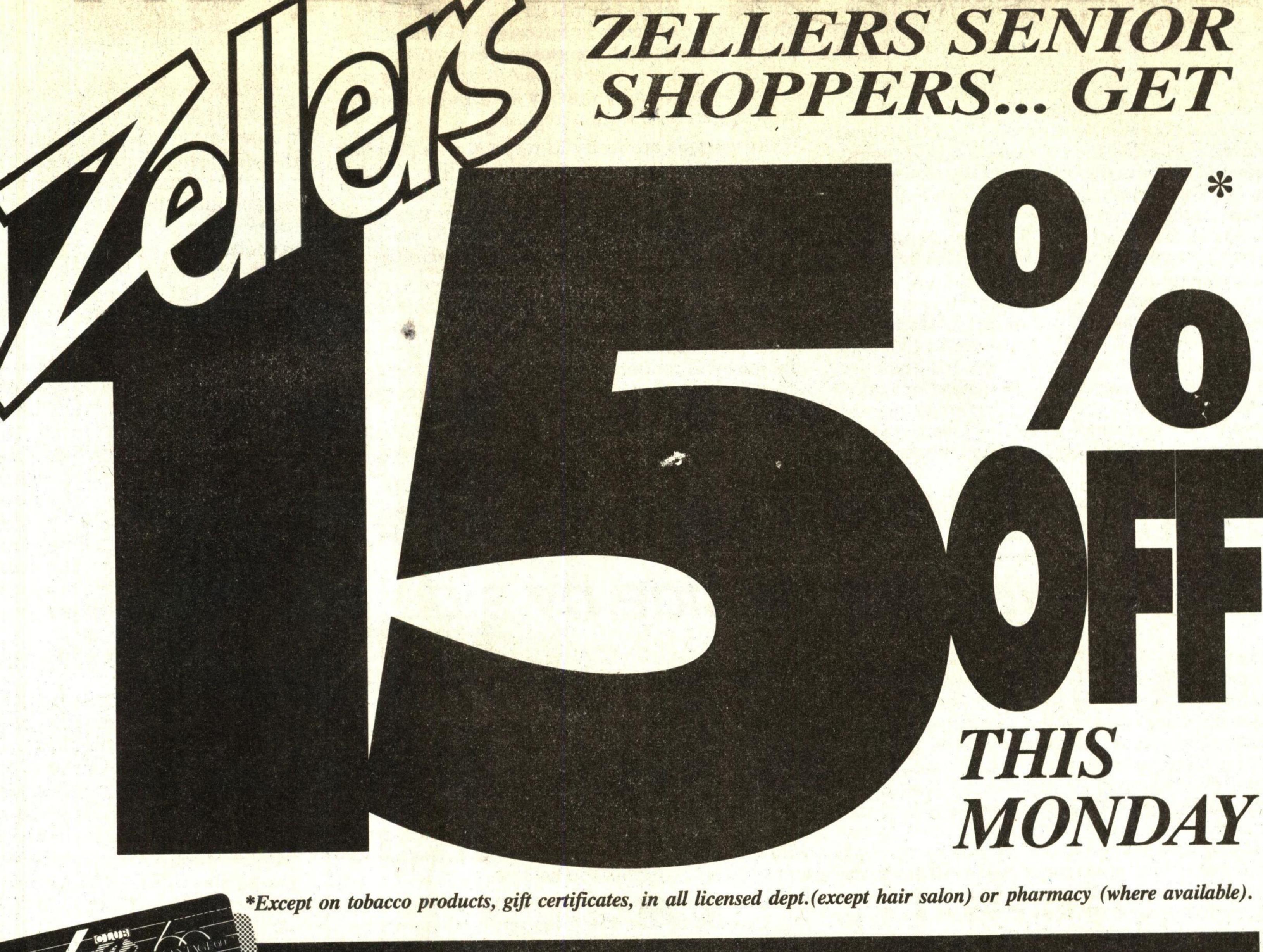
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