

Surviving summer stress

By DR. RICHARD EARLE
Special to the Halton Hills Weekender

For many mothers and fathers, the prospect of children home for the summer is more than just challenging - it's stressful. But the good news is that it doesn't have to be.

It's important for parents to realize that the onus shouldn't be on them to occupy every minute of their children's day. Nor should a parent feel guilty if there are no trips being planned or they've had to tell Timmy that computer camp is out this year.

Most of us have wonderful memories of summer. We've forgotten about all the boring, rainy days. And we want to recreate those great times for our kids. It's easy to fall into these two stress-creating mistakes, even with the best intentions. We believe summertimes were nothing but endless fun. And as parents, we believe we're totally responsible for giving our children the same wonderful memories. First, the reality is that only a small percentage of the times we remember were really that great. The rest were probably boring or just OK. But still we turned out fine.

Second, we created most of the fun for ourselves. Our parents only helped create part of it. This is an important point, because we sometimes forget that kids are naturally curious, and they will do their best not to be bored. If you as a parent can see summer as a partnership where you help your children develop their interests, you will feel considerably less pressured to deliver non-stop activity for bored children. If you take most of the responsibility, you'll set yourself up for feelings of inadequacy and for stress that you not only don't deserve but you also can't control. A partnership allows you to help the kids find their focus and mobilize their energy to create their own fun.

Start by talking to your kids to get a better understanding of what interests them and what they think is fun. Then together, develop a loosely structured daily agenda that gives your children a focal point and you a sense of control.

But avoid the temptation to over-plan. Sometimes kids just want to hang out with you. In a recent survey conducted by the IOF Foresters, 67 per cent of teenagers indicated that even they would actually like to spend more time with their parents - doing little things together.

So don't be too concerned about keeping kids busy - but if you want ideas for things to do, keep in touch with Parks and Recreation Dept.

regarding low-cost activities in your community. You actually don't need to go far to create a sense of novelty. Day trips are inexpensive. Besides, it might be fun to explore a part of your city with which you are unfamiliar, or visit friends or relatives in a nearby town.

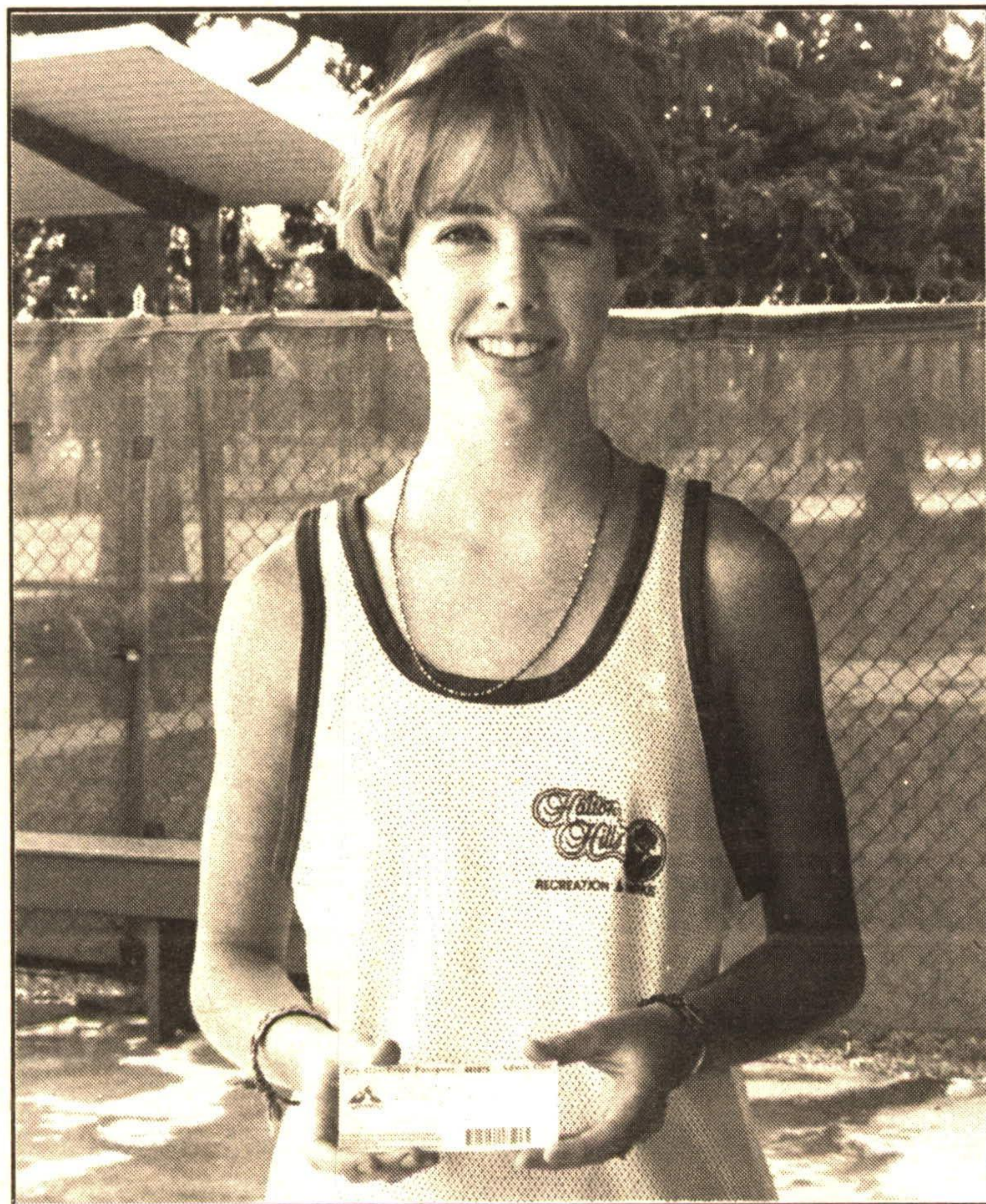
To really benefit from having your kids at home, though, you may have to adjust your perspective. Rather than focus on how little time you have to do your housework, or how much more of it there is now that the kids are home all day - see it as an opportunity to enjoy each other and do things together. Summertime is, after all, a time for parents and children alike to slow down, relax and refocus. So cut back on your expectations about daily cleaning and cooking routines and invest more of your time and energy in connecting with your children. After all, the chore of vacuuming the rug will be there in the

morning, but little important moments - like reading to them or just being at your child's baseball or soccer game - may just slip away.

However, while spending time with your kids is important, it is equally important to find time away, especially time in active pursuit of adult interests and relationships. This balance is important in order to keep your perspective fresh and your energy level up. Occasionally, arrange for your children to have a sleepover with their friends or ask relatives to share child care responsibilities for a short time.

Remember, with a little creativity and a flexible attitude you can enjoy summer too.

(Dr. Richard Earle is president of the Canadian Institute of Stress and Consultant to the IOF Foresters Family Stress Program. For more information call 1-800-268-6267.)



Customer service award

Lifeguard Carolyn Montgomery received the Halton Hills Parks and Rec Department's excellent customer service of the week award for a job well done in aquatics. Carolyn is a 16-year-old Bishop Reding student. This is her first summer working for Parks and Rec. Carolyn received two free passes to Canada's Wonderland compliments of the Georgetown Independent/Acton Free Press.

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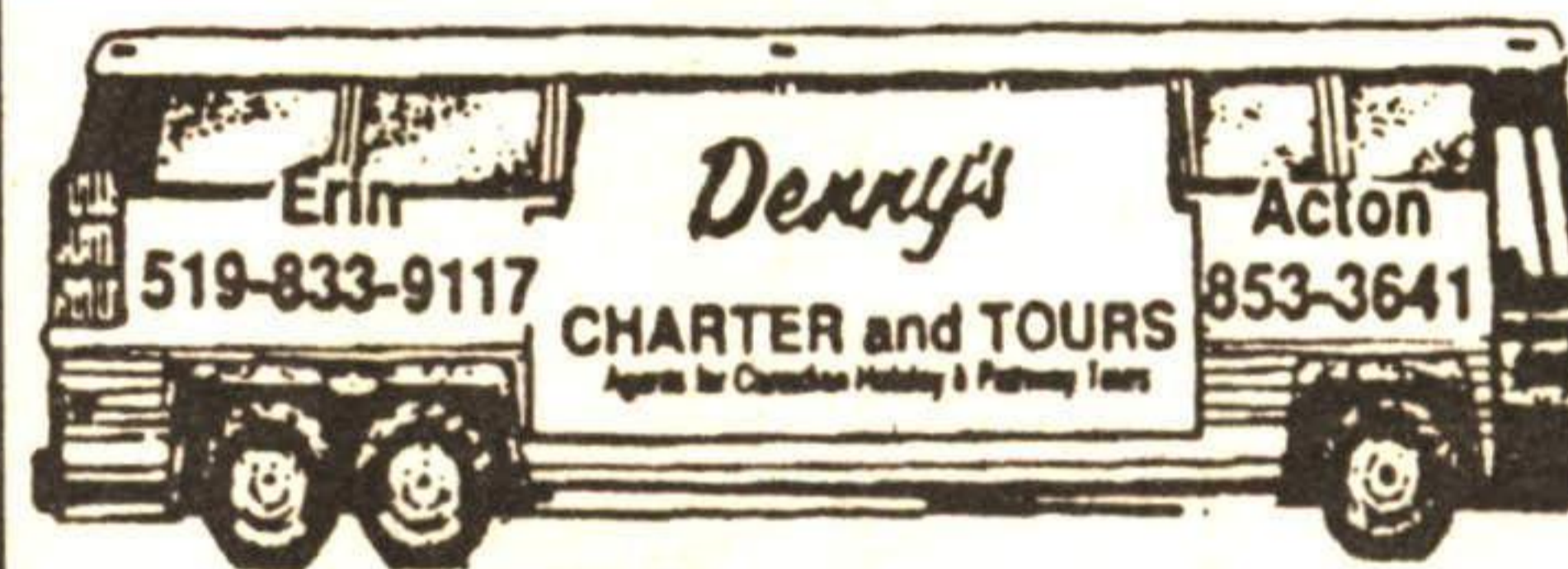
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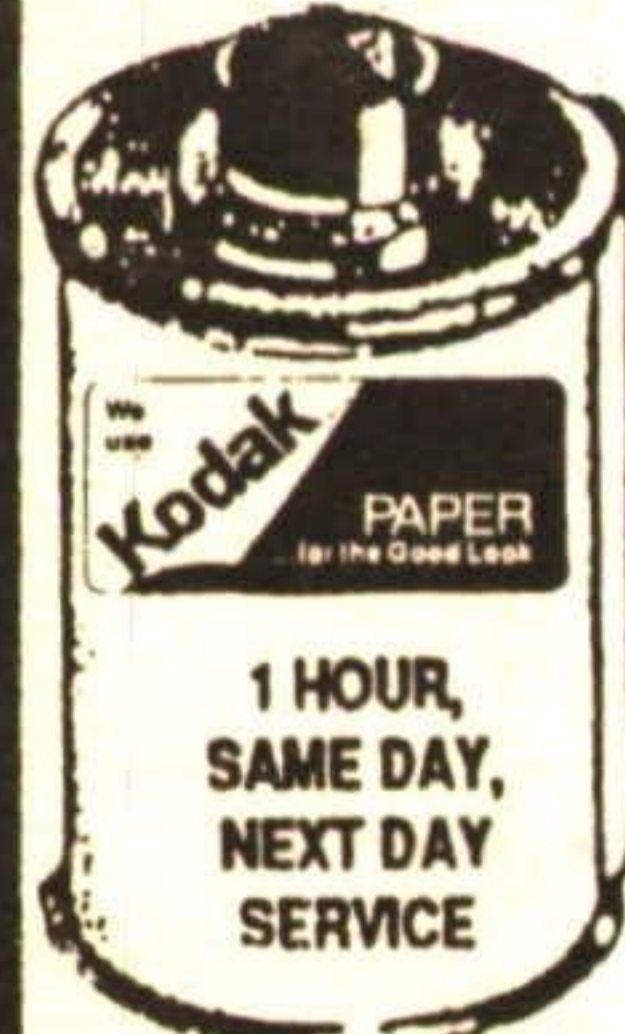
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