

Downtown loitering irks BIA and business owners

BY DOUG HARRISON
The Acton Tanner

Janis Fread, on behalf of the BIA and some local merchants, will soon be addressing a letter to 1 Division police headquarters in Georgetown concerning a loitering problem in front of some downtown Acton businesses.

The BIA's part-time coordinator last Wednesday called a meeting at Acton Bowl with BIA secretary Gerald Rennie, village constable Bill Riddle and business owners Ron and Jake Kuiken of *Halton Hills Furniture* and *Hoops, Pockets and More* employees Gord Labombard and Jane

Robertson.

The meeting was called specifically for a loitering problem in front of *Hoops*, but quickly involved talk of the other businesses on the north side of Mill Street.

Ron Kuiken pointed to a Friday night in late October when eight or nine kids planted themselves at the doorway of his business, making it unattractive for consumers and foot traffic on the sidewalk. After asking them more than once to move, the youngsters complied, but stationed themselves in front of *Andy's Restaurant* or *Hoops*.

"Kids, as a rule, don't move," said a frustrated Kuiken. "Cus-

tomers won't be attracted to my store if they can't see the door."

Riddle said there isn't much he can do other than approach the loitering group to move, but added once he leaves, they'll return.

"We're not over-policed in town," he said, "and that's one of the problems. I used to spend three to five hours walking the beat, but I can't do that anymore.

"Most of the kids are not a problem. It's a group of five, six or seven who obstruct the sidewalk."

Riddle stated the proximity of the sidewalk to businesses hasn't helped the problem, either. "The downtown is too small. If *Hoops*

was set back 50 feet, there wouldn't be a problem."

"I detest being blamed for a drop in business," piped in a perturbed Labombard. "I understand it maybe wasn't the best place to open (a pool hall-video arcade), but it was a vacant building and I thought it would make the downtown a little better."

The reason people are congregating in front of *Hoops, Pockets and More*, Labombard said, is because he doesn't allow smoking inside. At one time he did under pressure from area merchants, but has since forced clientele outside if they aren't buying a service.

The idea of a paid security guard in front of *Hoops* during prime evening hours was suggested at the meeting, but lost fanfare when Riddle revealed it would cost merchants \$41 an hour for patrol.

Rennie doesn't agree with a letter to the police commission, believing it's a long-term headache.

"You'll receive some bureaucratic statement saying they have no money and no manpower," he predicted. "(Premier Mike) Harris is giving everyone an excuse not to do anything."

Fread said if nothing is done, she will follow up with a letter-petition signed by merchants.

Preschool story time

Parents who wish to register their preschoolers for library programs should do so by tomorrow (Dec. 14). Programs at the Acton Branch include Tales for Twos - 25 minutes of songs, stories and games on Fridays at 10:45 am, beginning Feb. 2.

Preschool Storytime is a 30-minute program for 3 to 5-year-olds. It runs Wednesdays at 2 pm from Jan. 31 or Thursdays at 10:45 am from Feb. 1. Visit the library for more details.



CHESS MATES! Robert Little's Tina Parent, 10, right, ponders her next move, while opponent Sarah Lewis, 10, makes hers. The two Grade 5 students busied themselves at lunch playing chess on Friday. Teacher Mr. Sallami has 30 students in the school's chess club. (Doug Harrison photo)

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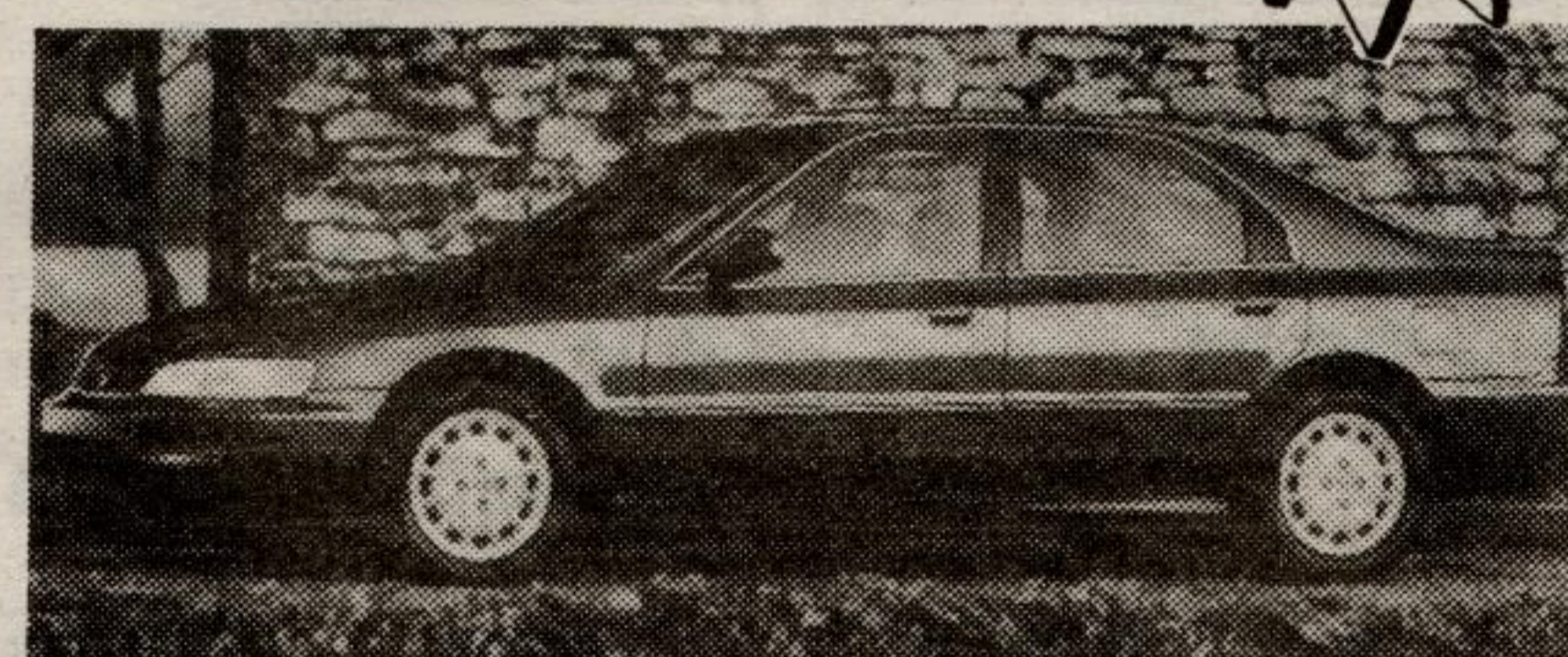
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