

# Fencing champion grateful for support from Milton businesses

## Leslie-Ann Gervais set to compete in the 2008 Olympics

BY JENNIFER ENRIGHT

Leslie-Ann Gervais, an accomplished fencer and surfer, knows how expensive it can be to compete as a Canadian athlete. The 27-year-old from Caledonia, Ontario says she has had to rough it. Once she slept in her truck prior to the US Surfing Championships and the night before she became the first Canadian woman to win fencing's North American Cup she spent the night in a bathtub.

For an athlete, sponsorships are critical and Leslie-Ann is grateful for the support she has received in many communities, including Milton where she's received assistance from The Vacuum Store, Tombro Trucking, Jencom, and Rigo-tec Welding.

The Milton connection began for her a number of years ago when she started snowboarding at Glen Eden as part of her cross training program. Leslie-Ann says she really likes Milton. "Everyone seems to be very interested in athletics."

Leslie-Ann now has her sights set on competing in fencing in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. But prior to that, her goal is to fence at the Canadian Fencing Championships in May and vie for top spot at the Pan Am Games. The three-time Canadian surfing champion would like to continue to test her abilities as a surfer. But all these competitions and the training are costly. "All my money is spent on training expenses, travel expenses, and the equipment required is expensive. My fencing blades are breaking all the time and they cost \$100 each."

But even with the expense involved, not to mention the long hours of training, it doesn't appear that Leslie-Ann will be giving up on her dreams. She says she always knew she wanted to become an athlete, even as a young girl. But the problem was, she didn't know which sport or sports she excelled at. She started to test her abilities in different sports, trying out one after another, and her parents finally gave up. "They never wanted to enrol me in another sport again. After the third sport, they didn't want to sign me up for something and then not have me go anywhere."

By the age of 15, however, she found a sport that helped her discover her talents as

an athlete. At that age, she competed in the modern pentathlon in swimming, running, show jumping, fencing, and shooting. But everything seemed to be leading her in the direction of fencing. At her first competition, she had everyone going off in the wrong direction during the running event. Swimming she found boring. Show jumping wasn't something for her either; "I always have bad luck in choosing a horse." Shooting? She says that bullets ricocheted back at her and she was told by someone once, "we hope you don't fence like you shoot."

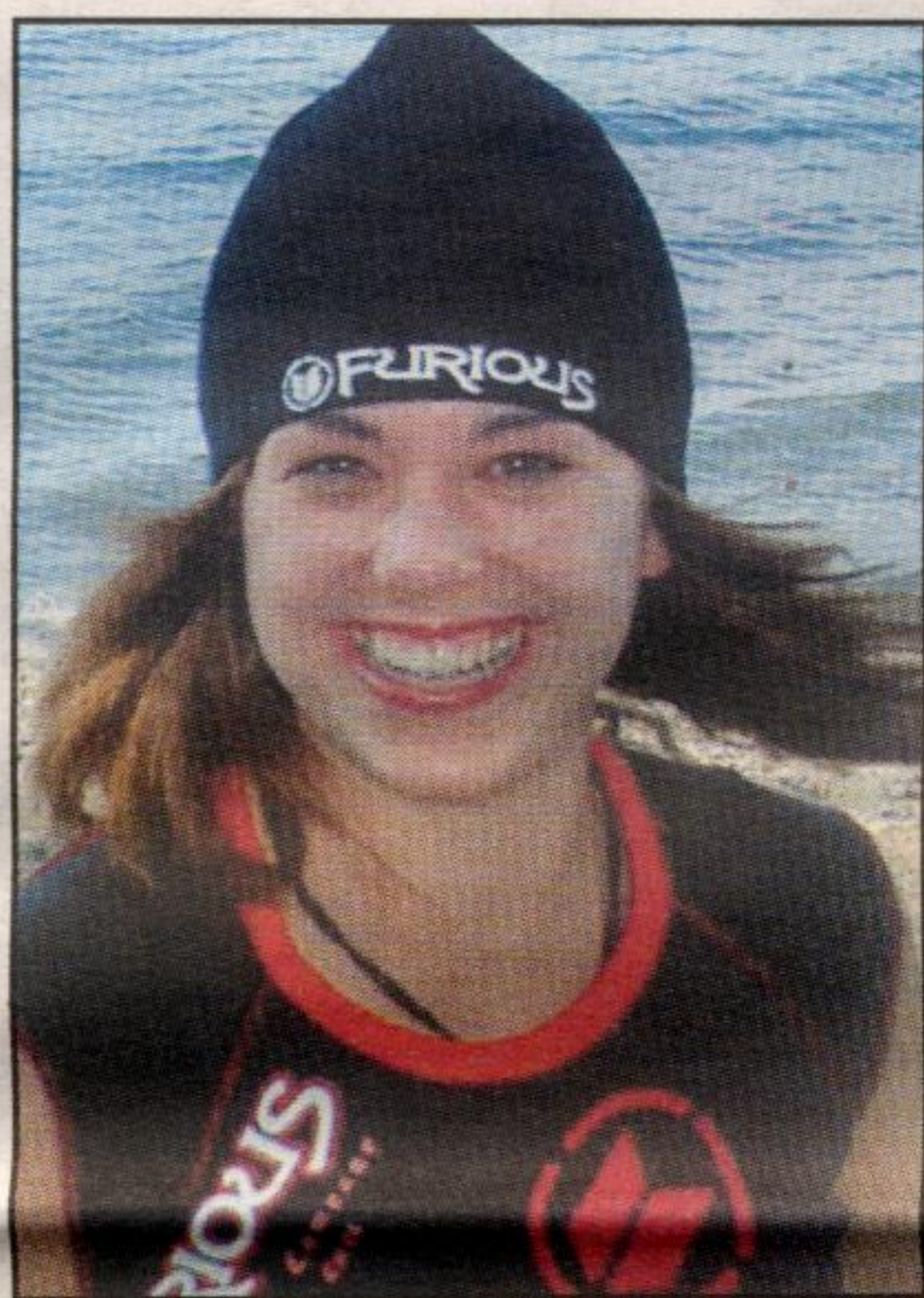
Leslie-Ann proved, however, that she could fence well. As a teenager, she received the highest score in fencing in the modern pentathlon and from there she went on to enjoy success in other fencing competitions. She has travelled a lot outside Canada to compete, and Leslie-Ann says that's how her interest in surfing actually started. Many of the places where she competed in fencing were also good locations to surf, so she decided to take up surfing. First it was simply for recreation, as a way to release the stress involved in fencing, but then she thought she might like to compete against other surfers.

She has known a lot of success in both her chosen sports, but there was one point when she retired for a time from fencing. "I lost my government carding after I injured my knee at a North American Cup event. I was fencing on a fencing strip which was not properly secured and I tore the meniscus in my knee."

Today, to help her prevent further injury, she is training with Master Lee of Mississauga, a Shaolin monk, to help prevent further injury. She says the program offered by Master Lee will help improve her fencing and surfing.

Leslie-Ann plans to continue competing in both sports, but she is likely to focus more on fencing now that she has her sights set on the Olympics. She says she's qualified for everything in fencing except the Olympics. "I feel like something is missing."

To offer financial support or to find out about Leslie-Ann, people can find information on her website [www.leslieann\\_gervais.com](http://www.leslieann_gervais.com).



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