

Starry, Starry Night

The Perseid meteor storm is visible in night sky

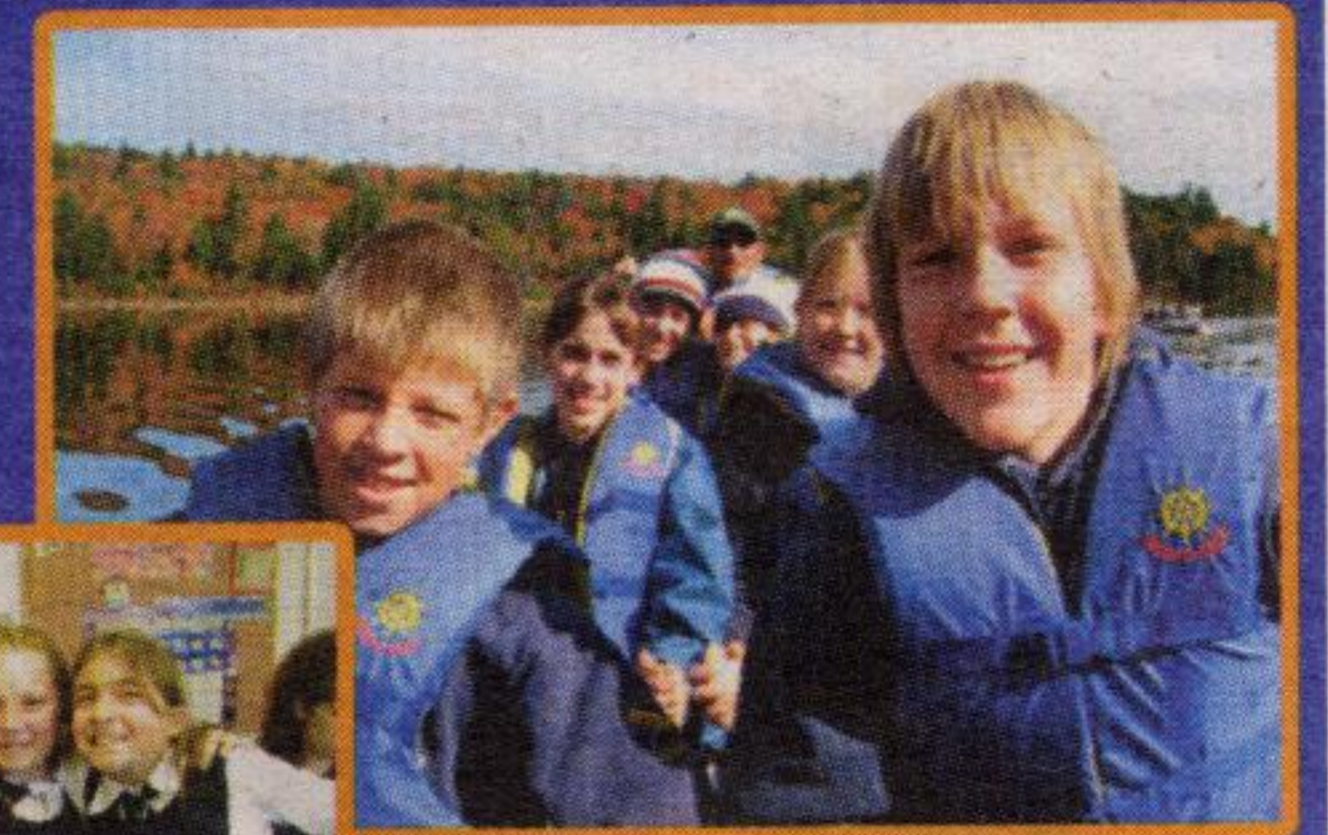
By ANN KORNUA

From August 8th to the end of the week, the Perseid meteor storm will be visible to star gazers in Halton and across Southern Ontario. On these evenings it is possible to see meteors, or as they are romantically referred to "shooting stars", on any clear night. At certain times of the year, meteor showers can light up the night's sky with over thirty meteors per minute. Areas in Halton away from the pollution of bright city lights, especially out in the country make the best locations for meteor watching.

The Perseid meteor storm is visible in Canada each year between August 8th and 14th but the recommended viewing time is Friday morning, August 12th when the shower should peak. Between 2 am and dawn, hundreds of meteors will blast down out of the constellation Perseus. The meteors will hit Earth's atmosphere traveling at 71 kilometres per second. At that speed, even a tiny morsel of dust creates a vivid streak of light when it breaks up in the Earth's atmosphere. Meteor showers take place when the Earth passes through the remains left by a comet. In July and August, the debris from the comet Swift-Tuttle's tail intersects Earth's orbit causing this natural and beautiful phenomenon.

Stargazers can witness the bright streaming lights of the Perseid shower all this week. An outdoor evening outing is a great family activity. Residents who live out in the country can try planning a shower party for family and friends by laying out blankets on lawns or setting up lawn chairs for the nightly show. Those town dwellers who want to get a view of the Perseid shower may want to go to open fields, such as soccer and baseball diamonds after the lights have gone out, or drive out to the escarpment. Local parks in Halton such as Mill Pond in Milton and along the Credit Valley River in Georgetown are great viewing areas (as long as the lights are low) but check with local town and city officials for park hours before you plan a long viewing adventure. Plan properly by packing flashlights, blankets, a cell phone, binoculars, bug spray and remember to be respectful of private property and the natural environment. The Perseid shower takes place every year around this time and is a great excuse to learn more about the skies above us.

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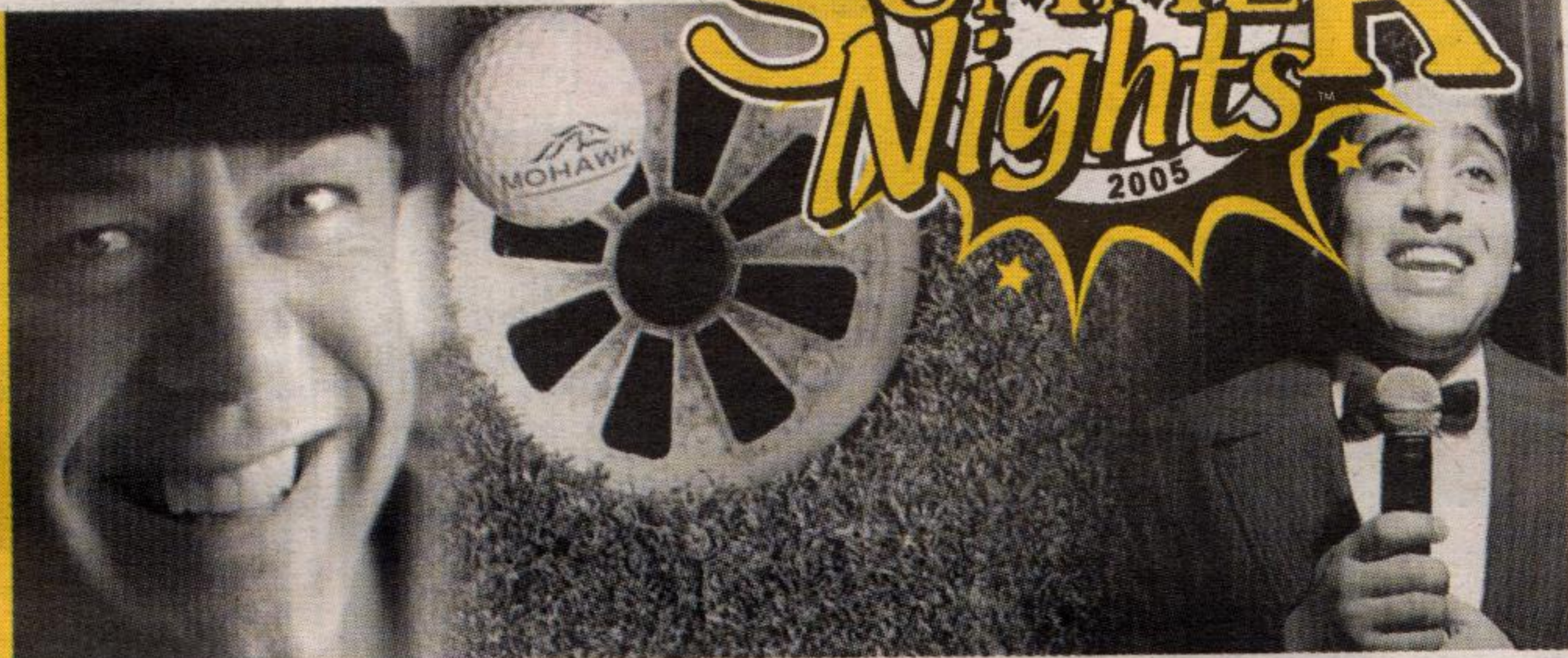
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