

# EDITORIAL

with Frances Niblock

## Mixed messages

Sometimes there's no rhyme or reason to the stories in the news but this past week there were a couple that intertwined on several occasions.

One involved a tough drug message for Acton parents — one a request from drug awareness officers for money and the other, a mixed message about drugs and Olympic sports.

Mountie drug awareness officer Constable Gord Jenkins had sobering news for a handful of parents at a support group meeting at Acton High Thursday on night. Drugs, all kinds of drugs, are both plentiful and cheap in Acton and marijuana is making another comeback with highest student use in Grade 11. Halton Police later confirmed that you could buy almost any drug you were looking for, even heroin, in Acton, just like you could in the rest of Halton.

Interspersed with stories of some of his more memorable busts and armed with displays of illegal and controlled substances and drug paraphernalia, Jenkins had no simple answers for parents worried about their kids using drugs.

Jenkins, himself a father of teens, said that it's not enough to tell kids that drugs are illegal and can kill and suggested that parents check to see what kind of role models they are and take enough of an interest in their kids' lives to know who their friends are.

Jenkins also suggested that parents get their kids involved in sports at an early age because, he said, "sports and drugs don't mix."

Or do they? They sure did for Whistler snowboarder Ross Rebagliati, who kept his gold medal despite testing positive for marijuana in Nagano. Jenkins and his Mountie experts, and a lot of others, don't buy the second-hand smoke story that saved Rebagliati's medal and are worried what example the elite Olympic athlete is sending to impressionable youth.

"It's hard to get through to some kids how dangerous drugs can be when an admitted user gets a hero's welcome and a snowboarding hill named after him," Jenkins lamented.

Jenkins would be the first to applaud International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch, who closed the Winter Olympics on Sunday with the announcement that the Olympic movement would shortly ban soft drugs such as marijuana.

"An athlete, above all an Olympic athlete, has to be an example to youth," the Spaniard said.

While almost no one I talked to about Rebagliati defended him, more than one questioned how the Canadian Olympic Association allowed such an embarrassing incident to occur.

The drug issue surfaced again last week with a notice from Halton Police that they are asking Halton's corporate citizens to help pay for drug education for Grade 6 students.

D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Program) is a 17-week program, taught by specially trained officers, designed to provide students with the self-esteem and willpower to refuse offers of drugs and alcohol.

Less than half the cost of the training is paid by the Halton District School Board, Halton Police and the Province, so D.A.R.E.'s volunteer board needs to raise \$250,000 annually and is asking for business to stage fundraising events with the proceeds going to D.A.R.E.

The cost in Ontario each year to deal with the fallout from drugs, including the cost for police, courts and treatment programs is \$2 billion — money that comes from our taxes so everyone is paying.

Rebagliati ought to apologize and make a very public contribution to a drug awareness program like D.A.R.E.

Acton business ought to dig deep to help fund the D.A.R.E. program and parents should talk about both stories with their kids.



**DO YOU KNOW THEM?** Acton Curling Club officials are trying to identify people and the year of this club photo so it can be properly framed and added to the club archives. Our publisher supplied all the names except the third man from the left in the back row. If you can help, call The Tanner at 853-0051. (P.S. if you want to check your list of names, see page 5.)

## Should parents pick up tab?

By **MAGGIE PETRUSHEVSKY**  
The New Tanner

Provincial politicians keep trying to convince us school officials don't know how to run the education system. That's why they need to come in and take it over.

After talking to Halton trustees and administrative staff I have to agree. The locals don't know what they're doing.

The culprits, however, are the provincial bureaucrats. If they don't get some facts and figures out to local authorities soon our public school system is definitely headed for a crash.

At the community meeting in Acton last week Halton District School Board chair Ethel Gardiner said parents have been very supportive of the system and offered to help in any way possible. Some have even offered to buy texts for their youngsters to use in their classes since youngsters often have to share texts already and budget restrictions don't promise more next year.

While it looks good on the surface, Gardener and staff services superintendent Paul Anthony see a couple of flaws to the offer. First, there will be parents in the system who can't afford to supply anything extra for their youngsters.

Second, why should the public let the government off the hook when it messes up?

So long as the system gets by somehow, the politicians will think parents don't mind digging into their pockets for their little darlings? Why should the public pick up the tab for these parents whose youngsters fill

the schools, they will reason?

Why should they? Because that's why we have a public system. Canadians have always considered those rosy-faced tots, angelic or not, to be the future of the nation. We want our kids educated because it's good for the country, not because we're pandering to parents' egos.

Likewise, if these youngsters fail to receive a proper education they won't be employable. No jobs, no income, and the welfare cycle rolls merrily along.

Gardiner and Anthony share the same fear over what the great class size changes will bring.

While average class sizes of 25 for elementary and 22 for high school appears great on the surface, they don't leave boards room to maneuver. The number of teachers must be tailored to match enrollments. But is that enrollment in a school, in a system, or across the whole province? It does matter how the province wants it counted because that tailoring is bound to involve layoffs. Teachers must receive legal notification of layoff or boards face charges like any other bad employer. Those notices need to go out soon to take effect by September. Is the province going to pay those fines for improper notification? I doubt it. But guess who will complain about boards not living up to their obligations and wasting tax dollars on fines.

A similar dilemma surrounds who is included in that list of classroom teachers. If special education teachers are on it, the amount of remedial help available to youngsters

will suffer greatly.

The government appears to see this as an unnecessary frill. They seem to want schools to follow the modern business philosophy. Either the kids match the profile of a good student, the way employees meet employer expectations, or we chuck them out.

Again, that's not the way education works. It's designed to help those who need it. Either they get the best education available to them or we're looking at that welfare cycle again. And we all know what those government advertisements said about "welfare bums".

How can the politicians pretend to be "improving" our system when they leave holes like this in their directions?

I'm not quite such an optimist as Anthony. I find it hard to believe this isn't a deliberate plan by the big business powers behind Premier Mike Harris. I suspect them of wanting to write off a goodly portion of Canada's working poor and gutting our education system is a great way to achieve it.

Education tends to be a complicated issue so uninitiated politicians may well believe what they are told. Harris, supposedly a former teacher, should know better. I left the teaching profession when my own children were pre-schoolers but I still understand the system's philosophy and what this will do to it. So should he. So which is he — stupid, or willfully blind? Neither assessment of his character is very comforting for me as a voter.



# The Tanner

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