

GRAPEVINE

BIGG SIGNS BIG

Congrats to Acton High School student Melissa Bigg who was signed recently to a full soccer scholarship with the University of Cincinnati – one of four schools that wanted the talented rural Acton resident on their roster.

Bigg plays for the Erin Mills Eagles that captured the Under-18 Ontario Soccer Cup to advance National Soccer Club championships in Nova Scotia in October.

Bigg scored seven goals in that National tourney, including four in the first game which was the first time the team had played since winning the Ontario Cup six weeks earlier.

Bigg, a Grade 12 student at Acton High School, began playing with the Georgetown Soccer Club as a 5-year-old, and was playing rep soccer before she was 10.

She joined the Erin Mills Eagles, in the Ontario Youth Soccer League, two years ago.

DOLL LOCALE

There are some downsizing changes coming to the Doll Emporium as owner Carla Snels closes the store and moves the stock and supplies upstairs to the existing studio in the family-owned building on Mill Street.

Snels plans to rent out the ground floor store now that her mother Elly Snels, who started the business in 1986, has retired and Carla is increasingly in demand internationally, teaching her specialty – painted eyes on porcelain dolls.

The store will close March 31, and what Snels doesn't sell will be moved upstairs to a store/studio that will be open two days a week, or by appointment.

"We'll be 20 years in business in Acton in September 2006, so we're downsizing, we're not closing. We'll still be open for business. I want to celebrate the 20 years," Carla Snels said, adding the changes will mean a "different entrance, different floor, better service."

HOLIDAY FUN

Thanks to the generosity of the Rotary Club of Acton, hundreds of people are expected to skate for free at the Acton arena every afternoon during the Christmas break, beginning Saturday, (December 24.)

The free skate continues December 27 and 31 and January 2 to 6,

from 1:30 to 2:50 p.m. daily.

For those who like their water wet, the Acton pool will be open for public swimming from Tuesday to Friday, from December 24 to January 6, from 2 to 4 p.m. daily.

It's \$2 for youth, \$3 for adults.

TV FAERIE

Former Acton artist Paulina Stuckey-Cassidy was featured on The Shadow Hunter TV show that aired on Space TV last night (Wednesday) in a segment that dealt with faeries and faerie lore in the world of the paranormal.

Stuckey-Cassidy, who moved to hurricane devastated New Orleans with her new husband, an American citizen, several months ago, was filmed at her former Acton home back in January for her segment, one of 13.

Stuckey-Cassidy's work has been featured in books, calendars and journals and her original prints are also for sale, some of them on-line through her Restless Moon Gallery, to help with hurricane relief efforts.

Stuckey-Cassidy said "faeries and other mystical beings of nature remind us that we're all still children at heart, helping us rekindle lost or forgotten innocence, and perhaps even provoke a little playful, harmless mischief."

NO GARBAGE CHANGE

Don't worry what day all that Christmas wrapping paper has to go to the curb – there is no change in waste collection days for garbage or Blue Box stuff over the holidays anywhere in Halton this year.

Halton will begin collecting Christmas trees – no plastic tree bags, tinsel, or ornaments, please – beginning the week of January 9, on the regular Blue Box collection day.

PRE-SCHOOL WORSHOP

Parents of Acton kids who will be beginning Kindergarten in 2006, may be interested in Halton's Ready, Set, Go workshops that will be offered in the New Year.

The first workshop, aimed at child health and development, will be held January 10 during the afternoon, and again January 11 in the evening, at the Our Kids HUB at Robert Little School.

For details, call Ontario Early Years, Acton satellite at 853-2574.

pants that were covered with ice melt, I offered them all a very Merry Christmas.

I had renewed faith in humanity. I had rediscovered the meaning of Christmas amongst the miserable store clerks and the endless lines of people rushing to find the perfect Christmas presents for their loved ones.

Christmas wasn't about how much you spend on someone or what you gave them, it was all just about caring for one another and perhaps tossing in a good deed here and there.



MARCHES & CAROLS: Bandmaster George Elliott led the Acton Citizens' Band through a well-received two-part concert on Sunday at the Acton arena/community centre. The first half was a salute to the Year of the Veteran and a join-in carol sing welcomed Christmas for the second half of the concert. – Frances Niblock photo

Simply said: Merry Christmas

I am a Christmas person. I love the lights, the excitement, the surprise and joy as our children open their gifts. I even enjoy the hustle and bustle as shoppers go about their errands. Always have. I get a little maudlin and think of loved ones who have passed on, friends far away and Christmas past I have enjoyed.

I grew up in somewhat modest circumstances but we didn't realize it. Christmas, however, was a time when my Mom always found something extra in the kitty. What I didn't realize and what I didn't notice was how small my parents' gifts were while we children made out like bandits. Remember, this was a cash society in the days before credit cards.

My dad was quite a character. You might call him "a scrounger" but never more than at Christmas. "I can get it for you wholesale" he'd offer. In those days when it was important to stretch a dollar that was a valued commodity. Mostly his "deals" turned out well but on the odd occasion when disaster struck, he'd have 12 months to pay the consequences. Mom ran a taut ship.

My earliest recollections centred on family gatherings at Christmas. Once the excitement of Christmas morning wore off it was time for all hands to get to work.

Christmas dinner was at our house because it was the biggest. That seems inconceivable now. Our little bungalow was 800 sq.ft. at most but it seemed huge to us.

About 3p.m. aunts, uncles, grandparents and assorted cousins would start to arrive. Sometimes we had 30 people in that little house. Unexpected guests were always welcomed. "I'll just throw another potato in the pot" my Mom would say. I look back on those years and feel fortunate there was so much love in our house.

As a teenager I couldn't wait to get out of the house and out from under my parents' control. Not at Christmas though, never then. For me a sign of passage was being allowed to go to midnight mass. For many Christians, religious

The Way I See It

with Mike O'Leary



services came first, then came the loot. My parents would attend mass Christmas morning and I would often be dragged along despite my protestations I had been the night before. "Can't go too often" I can hear her say.

Mary and I got married in mid-December. "Finally" I thought, "I'll be able to have a Christmas of our own." Was I ever wrong. Christmas became a travelling holiday. Each year we would battle rush hour traffic to get to Mary's home in Picton. There, when the kids were small, we'd go to midnight mass with her Dad. Grandma would babysit 'cause her mother she was "orange" and her father he was "green." But that's a tale for another day.

Christmas in Picton was wonderful until lunch was finished. Then we scooped up the kids and drove like hell to get to my Dad's house in time for more presents and a huge dinner. Mom died a year before we were married and I swear my Dad only had one recipe. Cook enough for 30. It would be midnight by the time we fell exhausted into bed. Raise your hands if the story sounds familiar to you.

Our children are grown now and it's not like they're not as much fun, but they're not as much fun. When the girls were small we used to cut our own trees. My friend Doug Wood and I would saddle a couple of horses and head out into the woods. There, we would look for trees that had a nice top. We'd climb 30 or 40 ft. up the tree and chop the top 7 or 8 feet off.

I'm surprised we didn't break our fool necks since some "Christmas cheer" was involved before setting out. Once home and erected, which was a minor engineering miracle in its own right, I would dutifully declare it "the best tree ever." Friends these trees were huge. They took up a large corner of the family room and I'd have to cut-off a healthy

piece at the bottom and trim off the top. I still have scrape marks on the ceiling from these trees. "Gosh" I'd say, "It didn't look that big in the woods."

One of the last ones we had was so big our youngest daughter was afraid of it. These days we have two trees. Mary's in the living room which is plastic and mine in the family room which is real. My trees have been getting smaller every year. I think this is a plot instigated by the bride. Our giant trees were fairly messy and the hours spent picking up discarded needles could have something to do with her motivation. This year's tree is the smallest ever at about 5ft. It's nicely formed though and very full. I call it "the branch."

My memories of our children's Christmas are probably much like yours. I treasure the looks of delight in their eyes as they open their gifts. I keep locked in my heart the looks of pride in their eyes as they watch excitedly while "the bride" or I open what they have chosen with care for us. It may sound to you that Christmas is all about the gifts but it's not. It's about those looks and knowing we're surrounded by love. That's why Christmas is so important to me. The presents will be forgotten as years pass. The love and care of family will be with you forever.

Because our family has mostly moved away I've had time this year to think about other people, other places. I think about other children who haven't been as fortunate as mine. I think about war-torn lands and our soldiers stationed there. I say a prayer for their safety and for peace. I think about friends who died this year and make a mental note to call their families. This will be a tough Christmas for them.

This Christmas morning our girls will once again gather at our house. I'll rejoice when I see again those looks in their eyes, and experience the contentment only Christmas can bring.

From our house to your house: Merry Christmas and the happiest of New Years.