

Workshop at JET High school students discuss racism

By JANET BAINE
Staff writer

A day-long workshop on racism and equity was held Tuesday at the Halton Hills Cultural Centre for students from five high schools in north Halton.

Elizabeth Carmichael, chair of the North Halton Cultural Awareness Committee which organized the event, said the idea for the program developed during a day-long workshop at Acton High School last February.

"I thought, why don't we join all the schools, especially the public and separate schools, so students will be hearing the problems of other schools and they can join and do something," she said. Carmichael said she asked each of the five high schools in north Halton to send some Grade 10 to 12 students from different racial backgrounds, including students who are not members of a minority group.

"The students were really thinking today, and they will go back to their

school and set up further workshops for educational sessions," she said. "We don't have a racist behind every bush, but there is a problem and we have to face it."

North Halton is not as ethnically diverse as south Halton and other communities nearby, but Carmichael said it is coming and "we have to be prepared for changes; we have to feel comfortable accepting others."

"There was so much energy here today in the discussion with Chief (Peter) Campbell," she said.

Campbell and other members of the Halton Regional Police Service began the day with exercises to get students thinking about racism and equity. They discussed different views of racism and the problems students perceived in their schools.

Later students from White Oaks School in Oakville described an equity committee which has been operating at their school for a few years. About 35 per cent of the students at the

school are members of minority groups and 40 students are on the committee. These students have held workshops on topics like Islam and Japanese culture to promote cultural awareness. They've also held an international fashion show and had an international food fair in the cafeteria.

But White Oaks has not only promoted equity, they have also had to contend with racism due to an influx of hate literature and an incident of racist vandalism last June. Instead of inviting the media in to publicize the racist messages in the vandalism, members of the equity committee wrote a victim impact statement, saying how they felt about the racist act and how they would like the vandals to be punished, if they are caught.

Police chief Campbell said the day reminded him of the number of kids who are solid citizens and the need to build new bridges to end discrimination.

'Racism a limiting problem' says Lewis

Former National Football League player Richard Lewis spoke to high school students at a workshop on racism and equity Tuesday (Sept. 26).

"We need to take the limits off of our minds because racism is a very limiting problem," he said. "It restricts people from what their true potentials are."

"Most young children of my skin color think of themselves as different, as inferior," he said. "I grew up in the United States where I had opportunities to get into professional football. Things happened for me not because I was black, big and could run fast, but because I saw myself as a professional athlete and I trained like one."

Lewis said lots of people told him he would never succeed in his goals, but because he saw himself as an athlete, he trained, was offered a university scholarship and studied hard so he could receive a B.Sc. degree.

"I chose to get to the NFL, I would live or die to get there. Have you ever felt that you are on a mission to do something? I was on a mission," he said.

As an athlete, he had several images of success and he began modeling himself after other successful

athletes, thinking, "if that guy can do it, I can do it."

He described an experiment in which grasshoppers were put in a container and each time they jumped, they hit the top of the container.

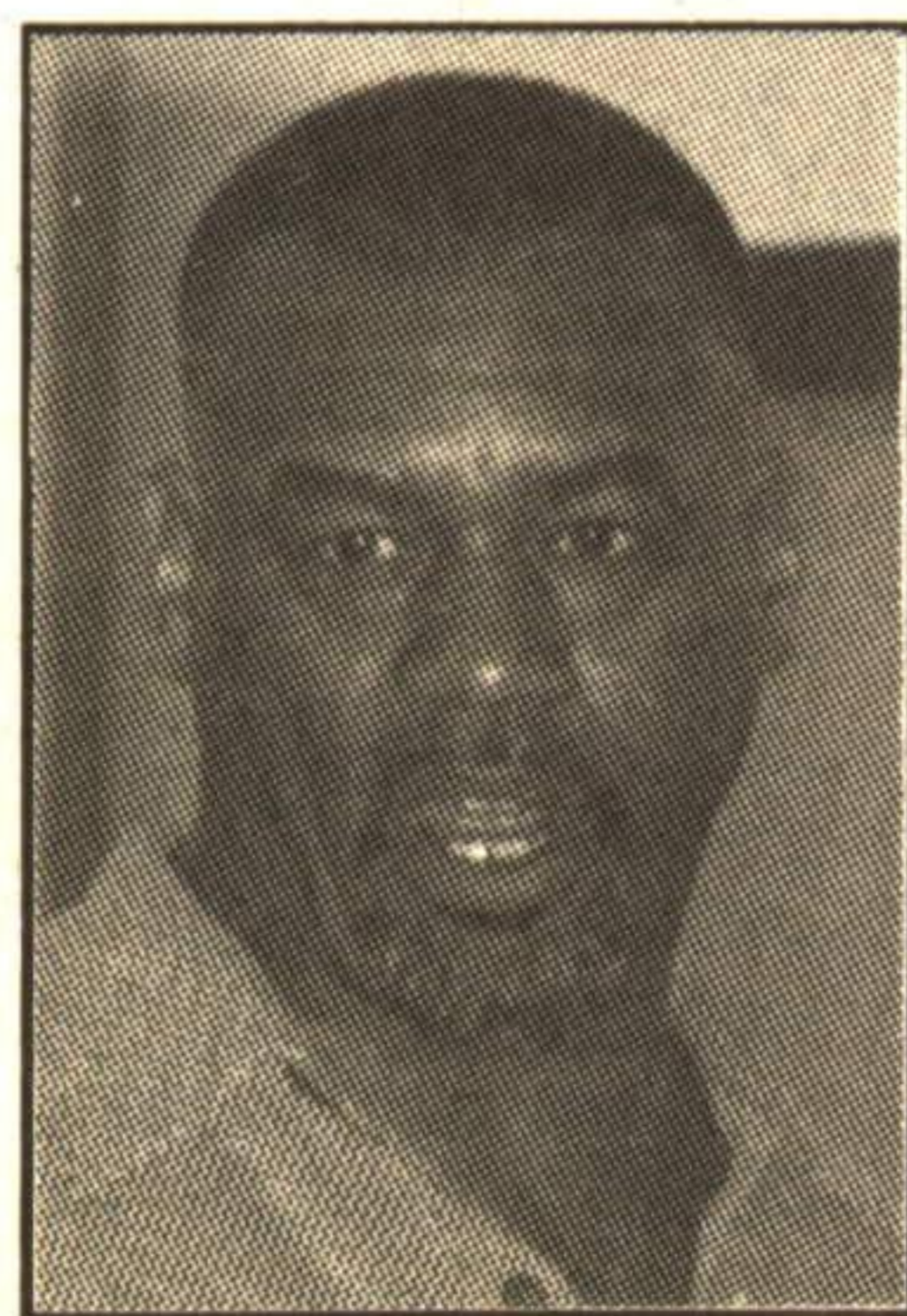
With time they didn't jump so high and when the lid was taken off, they stayed inside the container and wouldn't go any higher.

"What you're seeing today is a free man. I have no limitations other than the debts I've incurred. Every one of us has got to understand what is happening in our society today is we are different, there are differences. As long as you understand who you are, you can achieve your goal," he said.

Lewis said while he was pleased with his athletic career, he was disappointed his team never won a championship and he didn't have a championship ring to wear on his finger. But as a coach of a semi-professional team in Toronto in 1993, he made it his goal that his team would win a championship that year and they did it.

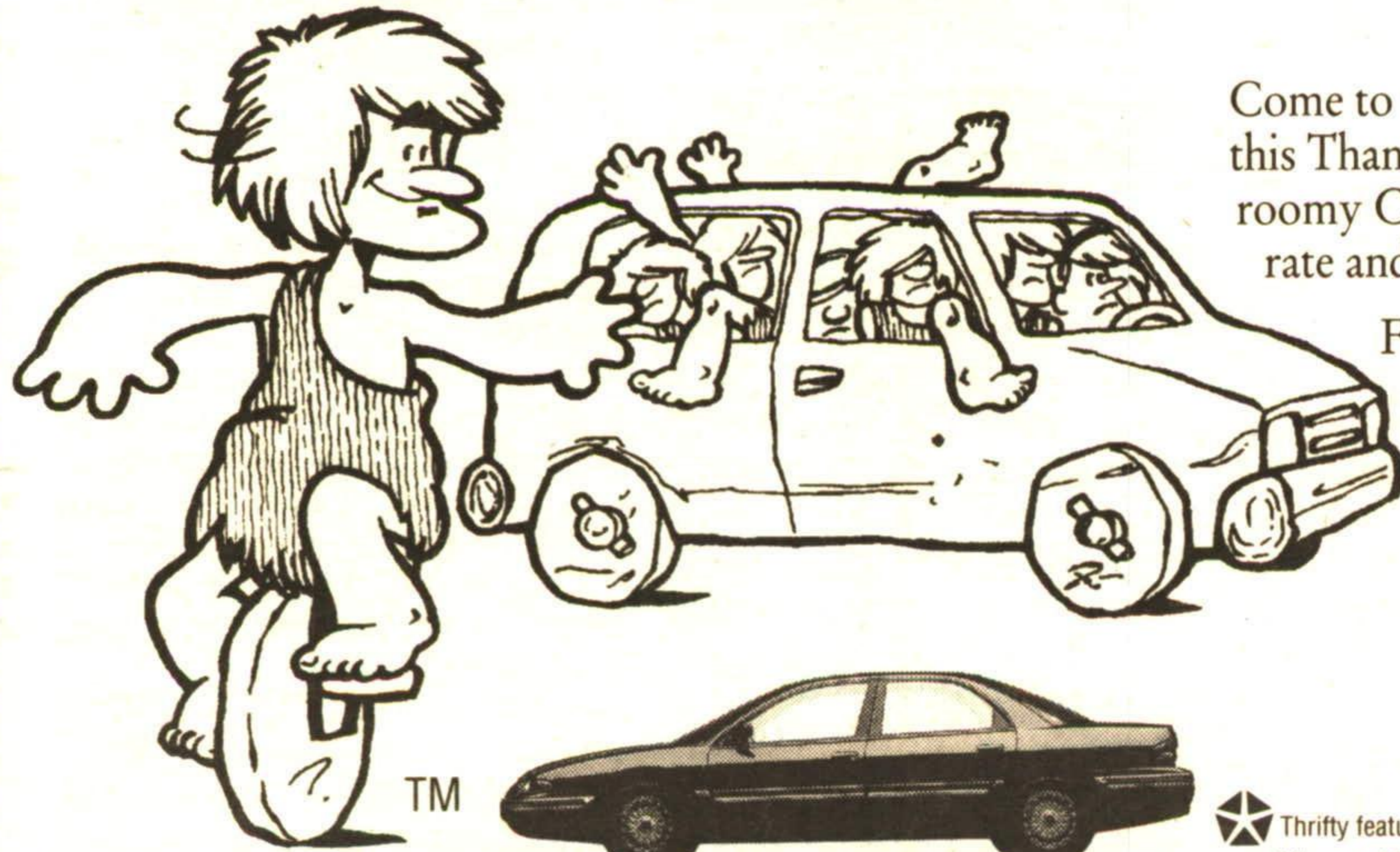
Lewis said that 95 per cent of people who reach 65 years and are ready to retire are really struggling and aren't happy with that they have achieved.

He urged the students to make their education their first career, to set goals and strive to achieve them.



RICHARD LEWIS

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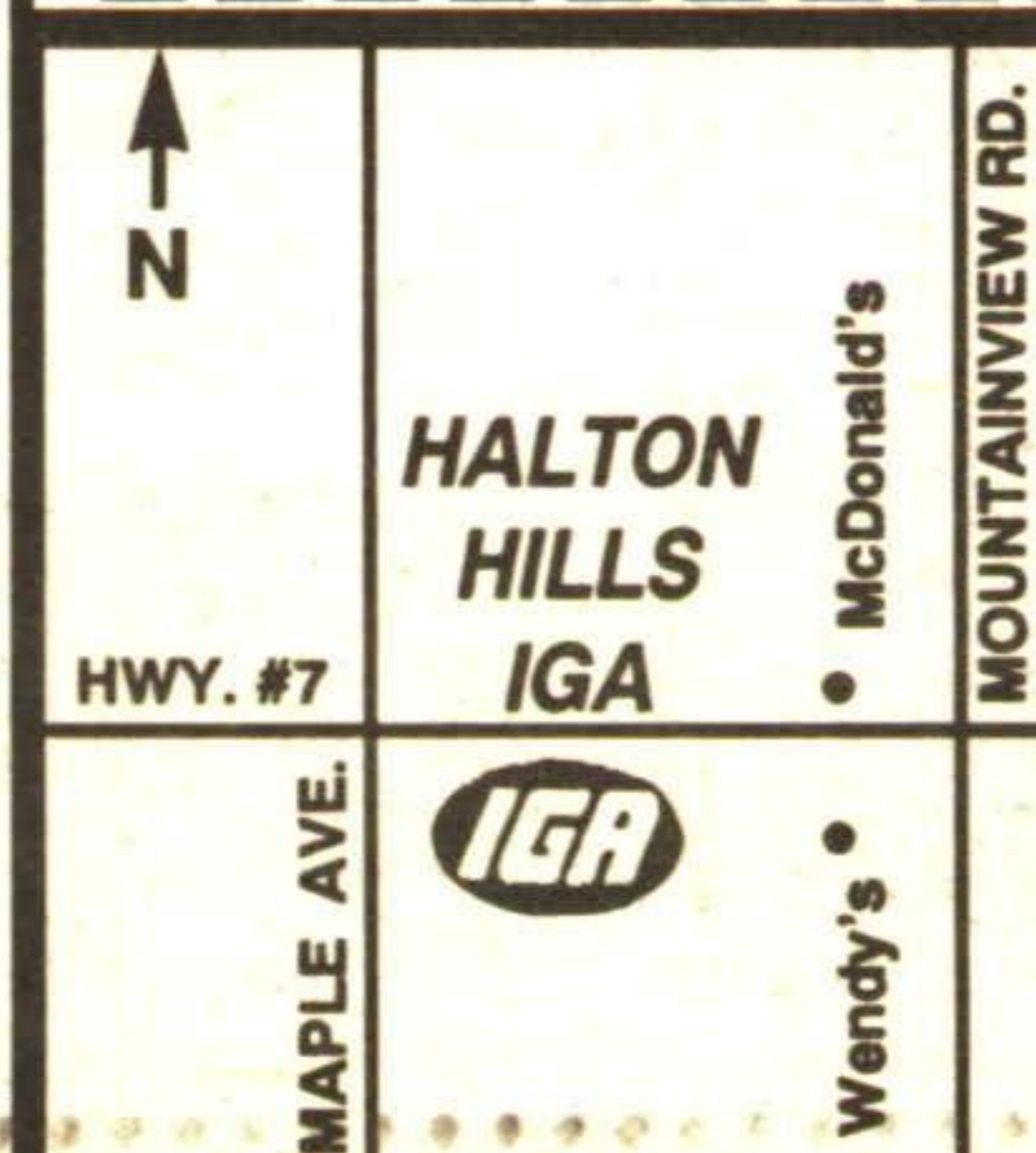
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