

Head lice can be a year-round problem

By LISA TALLYN
Staff Writer

Head lice are a year-round problem that don't just surface in elementary schools says Mary Gurba, a public health nurse with Halton Region.

Gurba, who works with the region's children's health services team, says head lice are always in the community and preschoolers and adults account for 30 to 40 per cent of head lice cases. Head to head contact is the key for spreading the tiny, wingless, grey insects. She adds head lice infestations have nothing to do with cleanliness and lice actually prefer clean hair over dirty hair. She adds lice can't be transmitted from animals.

Gurba says head lice, which have been around for thousands of years, (nit combs used to remove empty shells of lice eggs, were found in Egyptian tombs) live in human hair and feed off human blood.

Each female louse lays about five to eight pinhead-sized eggs a day close to the scalp for warmth and easy access to their food supply. Within seven to ten days the eggs hatch and the new lice start eating.

Gurba says people with head lice may not know they have them, and by the time their head itches there could be hundreds of eggs on the scalp.

For that reason Gurba says adults should check each other's and their children's scalps, particularly near the neck area and behind the ears, once a week. She stresses it's important for parents to check their kids especially after group activities, summer holidays and sleepovers. Finding the problem early means less eggs to remove.

"Parents should teach children to brush and comb their hair every night," says Gurba. Brushing and combing injures the head lice so they fall off and can't breed.

Anyone who finds head lice or their eggs should call Halton Region's Head Lice Information Line at 878-8113 (Georgetown), 853-0501 (Acton), ext. 5423 for information on how to get rid of them.

Gurba says there are numerous products available to kill lice and eggs and a pharmacist can help to find the right one as some shouldn't be used on young children, people with allergies or pregnant and breastfeeding women.

"It is important to treat only those with head lice," says Gurba. She says treating people who don't have lice may increase the resistance capabilities of the lice to the treatment products.

She says after the shampoo or cream rinse is applied the hair should be rinsed under the tap instead of in the shower to ensure the product isn't swallowed or doesn't get on the rest of the body. A towel should be held tightly over the eyes while rinsing and the person applying the product should wear gloves.

After the hair is dried the scalp should be checked in natural light by separating the hair. Live lice should be pulled out and squashed. Some eggs may not be killed by the treatment and will need to be removed. Gurba says nit combs will pull dead casings out of the hair but aren't 100 per cent effective at removing the eggs close to the scalp. Those should be pulled down the hair shaft with the thumb and first finger.

She says that some of the treatment products may need to be repeated in seven days and the product directions should be followed carefully.

Gurba says extensive cleaning after head lice have been discovered isn't necessary. She says an ordinary housecleaning is all that is required and any louse that is found off the head shouldn't be a big concern because it is injured or dying, and can't get back on the head.

Town to reduce grass cutting this summer

The Parks Department will be reducing the acreage of grass it cuts this summer to save \$11,116.

Those parks affected includes sections of Glen Williams Park, Georgetown South Community Park, Hornby Park, and Limehouse Park.

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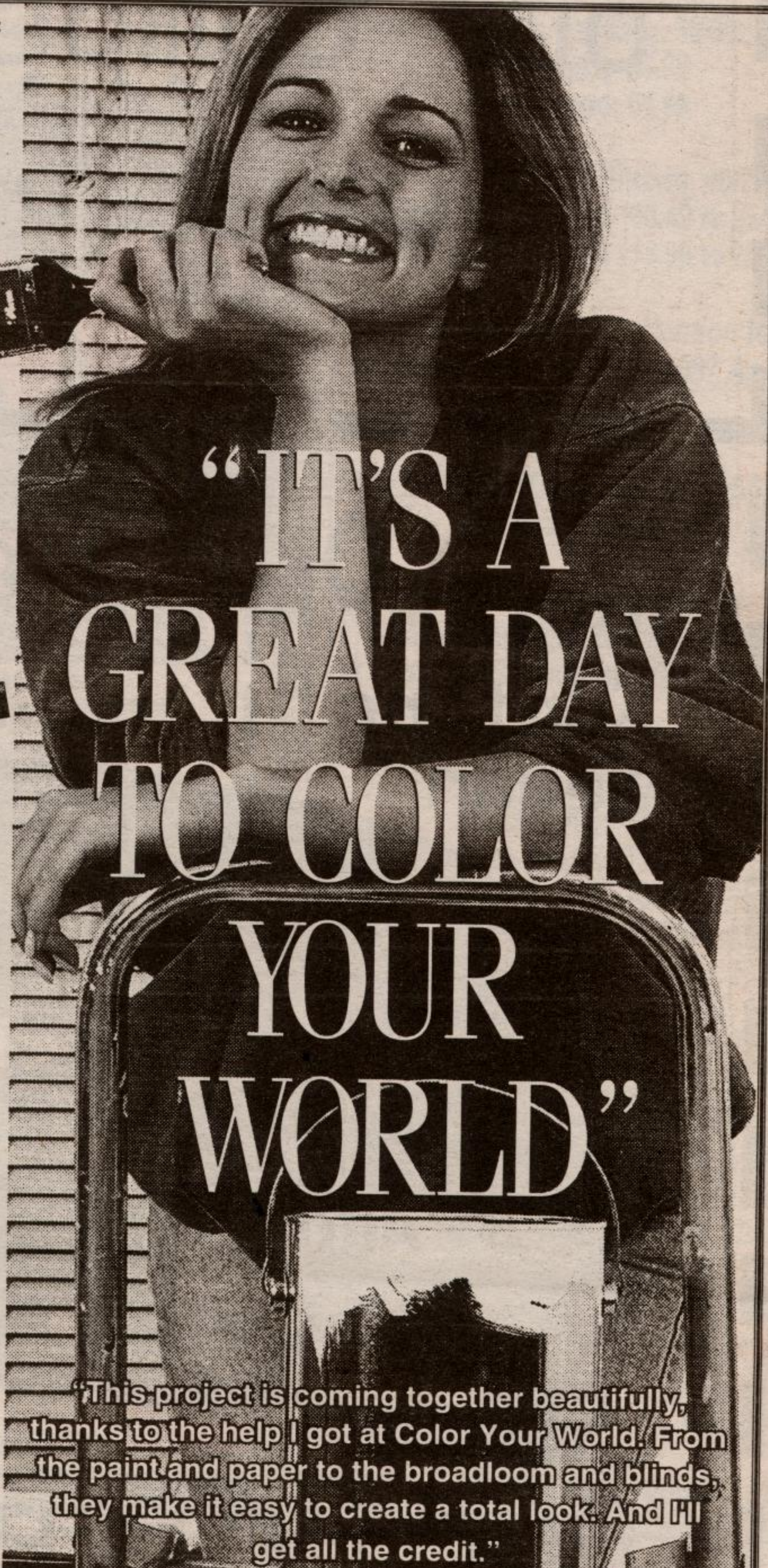
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