

Halton Hills to get roving clinic this fall

Sex clinic offers info without judgment

BY IRENE GENTLE
Special

The sons and daughters of the sexual revolution may have acted as trailblazers for free love, but that doesn't mean their kids want to talk to them about sex.

"Whether the parents are open or not, the perception is, 'I can't talk to them,'" says registered nurse Linda Black, who works out of a storefront sexual health clinic run by the Halton Regional Health Department.

The clinic—located at the Lakeside Plaza in Burlington (5353 Lakeshore Rd. unit 2)—will operate a roving clinic once a week this fall in Acton and Georgetown alternately. A Milton clinic operates every Wednesday on the second floor at 217 Main St. unit 13.

Although all age groups are welcome, the vast majority of clinic clients are young and female—usually aged 16-19.

These are the kids who figure that engaging their family doctor in straight sex talk must be one of Dante's rings of hell.

"The perception is that the family doctor is going to tell their parents," says Black.

Though physicians operate under strict confidentiality laws, teens and young adults often prefer to unload sex or relationship travails at a clinic.

"We're a more comfortable alternative," she said. "The perception is it is safer to go to us."

Clinic staff work hard to ensure that confidentiality is not betrayed.

That means never leaking information to upset parents bent on getting the dirt on their child's sexual behavior.

"We do get irate parents calling and we get sneaky parents calling," says Black. "But anything (clients) tell us is completely confidential."



Linda Black, a registered nurse who works in the Halton Regional Health Department's sexual health clinic, says the vast majority of clinic clients are usually female and between the ages of 16 and 19.

Reportable diseases such as HIV or AIDS are the only exceptions.

In those cases, the law dictates that the health department be notified. They, in turn, have to report to the Ministry of Health. The client's partner is also informed.

"We get parents calling in saying, 'How dare you serve my daughter, she's only 14,'" says Black. "We say we can't tell them if their daughter came in or not."

The clinics themselves are both accessible and discreet.

Despite frequent education blitzes, consistent condom use is a tough sell for teens and adults whose self-image is under siege, says Black.

And though safe sex is encouraged by clinic staff, judging a client's bedroom behavior is not.

"We do try and reinforce condom use but we don't shove it down their throats because they won't come back if you are lecturing them," she said. "We have to look at what behaviors are realistic for them. We try to look at them as a whole person."

If fractured self-esteem is acting as a barrier to condom use, counseling may help.

To protect those who are not yet ready to protect themselves, the clinics

offer straight-up information and treatment on common sexually transmitted diseases like genital warts, herpes and chlamydia.

Birth control devices can also be purchased at the clinics.

A more tolerant climate is helping gay and bisexual teens and adults come to grips with their preferences sooner, said Black. But, those struggling to cope with gay, lesbian and bisexual issues can hook up with a support group through the clinic.

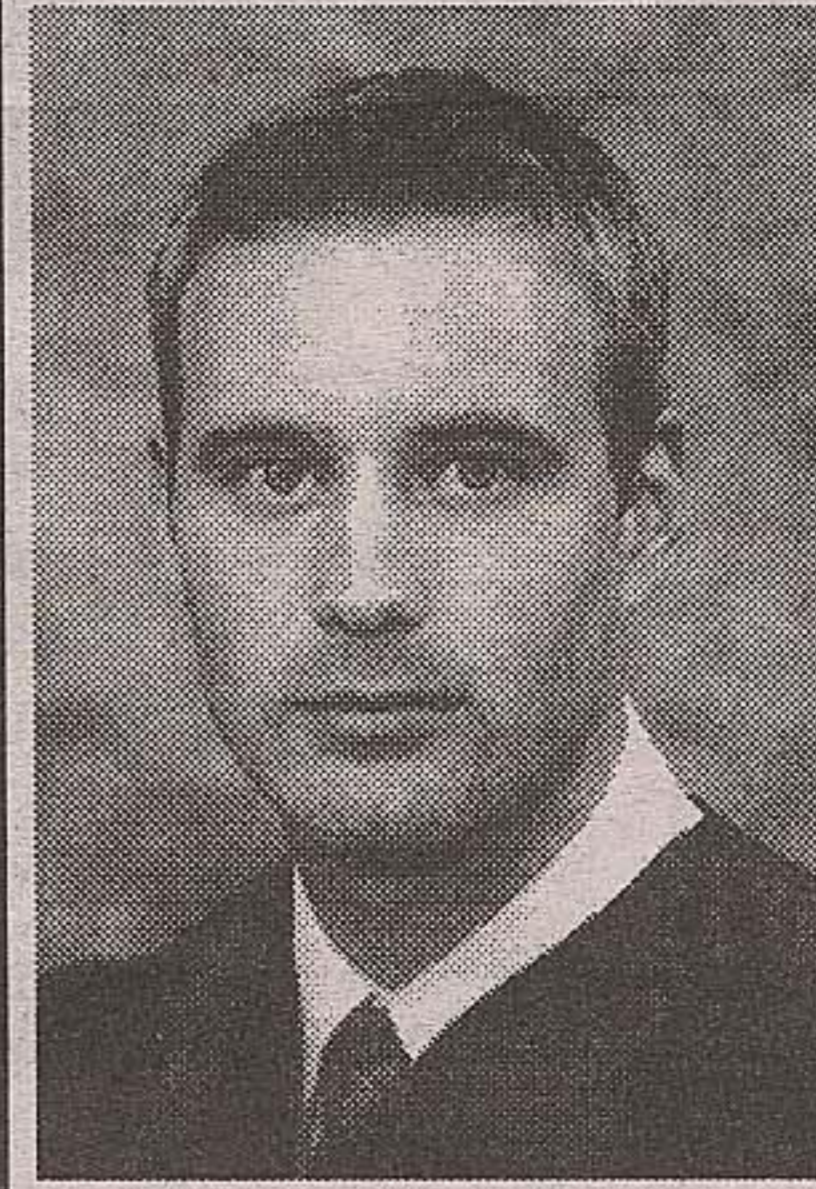
Since the mandate of the clinic is sexual health for the entire community, its range of services is far wider than when it debuted in 1978 as primarily a family planning clinic.

Today, it attempts to address issues from the sexuality of the developmentally challenged to pregnancy options.

A staunch pro-choice stance has, at times, brought the clinic under attack.

"There are pockets of the community who are resistant to what we're doing here," said Ms. Black. "Certainly the pro-life movement wasn't happy."

The clinic does not advocate for abortion, but it does provide a safe, non-judgmental place for people to get information, says Black.



MARK ALDRIDGE

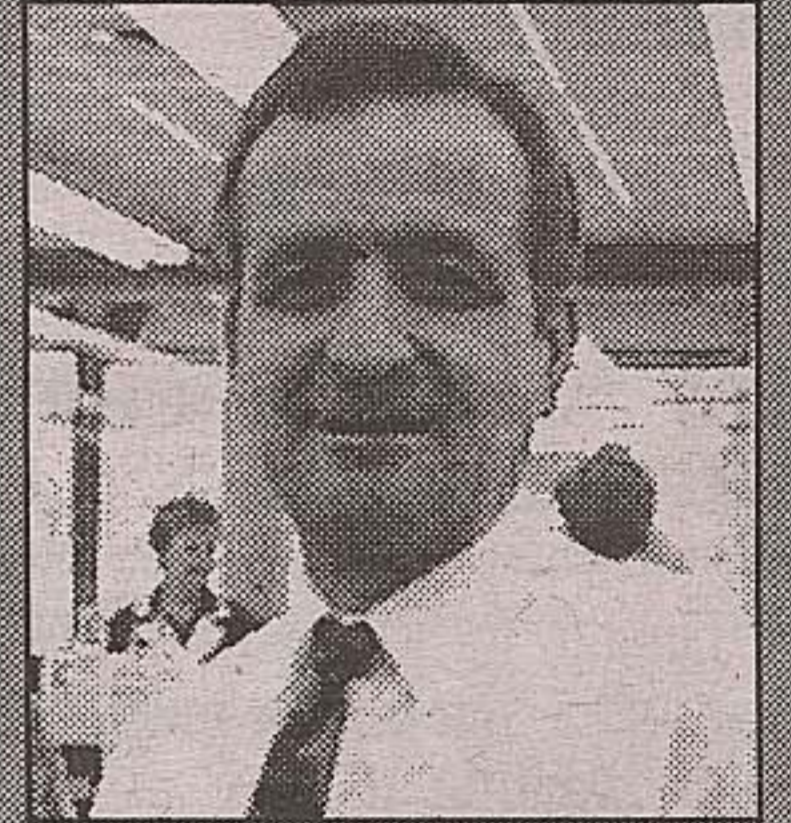
Mom, Dad, Lauren, Gavin and Kelsey

Mark's family congratulates him on the completion of his Bachelor of Science Degree in Business, from Nova Southeastern University, in Florida. Mark graduated with honours and was named Captain of the Men's Golf Team. We are all proud of your dedication and achievements and wish you continued success in your pursuit of a Graduate Degree.

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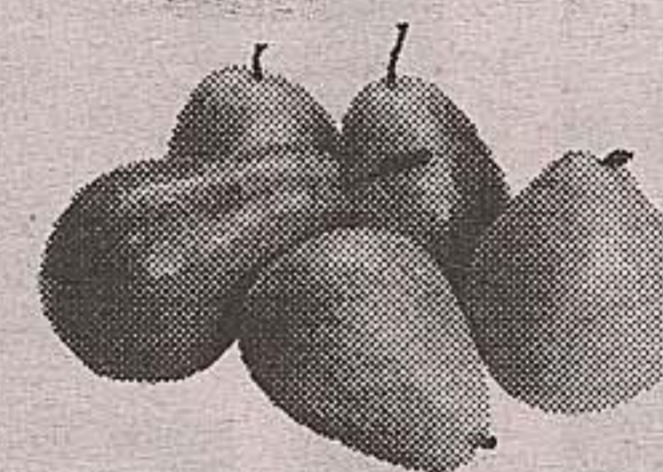
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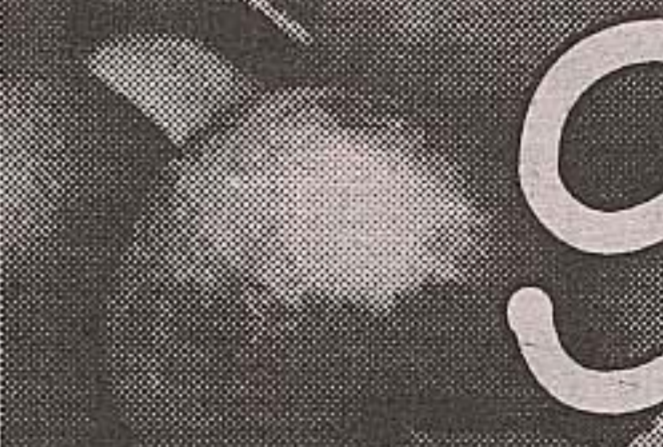
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