

# Homing Pigeons racing back to Rockwood

By Rebecca Ring

Rockwood's Norm Armstrong has a passion for pigeons. He has been raising and racing homing pigeons in Rockwood for 22 years. A member of the Guelph Racing Pigeon Club, he races his flock every weekend from May to September. Amazingly, the pigeons find their way home to Armstrong's backyard from as far away as Grand Mere, Quebec, a 670 kilometre trip.

The birds are taken to the starting point in a trailer, then released. The winners are determined using electronic "clocks" attached by bands to the birds' legs. Coop location differences are factored in and a winner is declared.

Armstrong says the birds fly about 50 miles per hour. His birds have won several races over the years. His best year was 2002 when he won five races. His proudest moment was when 12 pigeons



**FUTURE RACERS:** These two baby pigeons will soon grow their beautiful feathers and fly in races of up to 670kms. They are the pride and joy of Rockwood's Norm Armstrong. *Rebecca Ring Photo*

arrived at their coop over a two-minute period, which is very unusual.

It all began for Armstrong in 1985. His friend Bill Wilson, also of Rockwood, was into the hobby and Armstrong became interested. Wilson

gave him some "youngsters" and he went home and built them a coop. He started with 20 birds and now has 130, some of which are descended from the "Hogan Dynasty," which belong to Ozzie Van Harebeke, who has won the most awards in Canada.

Armstrong loves his pigeons. "It's his whole life. He would set a cot up in the coop if he could," jokes wife Bev. He knows them all by number or name. He says the most important thing is to keep the coops dry and clean and maintain the health of the flock. He provides one and a half as many perches as birds so nobody does without. He feeds them a mix of grains twice a day. His birds have different patterns such as blue bars or checkers, pied or white, but all are nice and shiny - with a beautiful green hue on their neck "indicating a healthy condition."

Armstrong keeps the gene pool varied by periodically introducing new hens. He breeds them in late February.

A hen lays two eggs in three days. She and the male take turns sitting on the nest and they hatch in 18 days. Both parents produce "crop milk" secreted from the lining of the crop, where food is stored and digested. They feed the babies this highly nutritious milk for about five days. After that, both parents feed them regurgitated grains until the babies can eat on their own at about 25 days of age. Armstrong now has 45 babies which he will begin racing as yearlings.

Nobody knows how the pigeons find their way home. There are theories that they use the sun's position, or have an internal compass, which follows magnetic fields. They also have incredible eyesight. Regardless, it is an intriguing instinct. "People began racing them as a hobby in Belgium and now they race all over the world. It is a dying sport though, probably because of a lack of awareness," says Armstrong. His own children were very interested when they were younger but, like most kids, have moved onto different things as teenagers. He hopes they return to the homing pigeons as adults. There are 21 members in the Guelph club, which meets at Marden Park every weekend.

The **ROCKWOOD** Miller

## Lucky Lost Dog

To the editor;

We moved to Rockwood 19 years ago from a large city. It took some getting used to. We did not have to worry about locking our doors, our six-year-old son could ride his bike up and down the streets with little worry and we tended to know each other's business good and bad.

This Victoria weekend, our beloved dog Jak was put outside to do his nighttime business and was spooked by fireworks. My oldest son discovered that Jak was so scared he dug his way out of the gate leaving all his fur from his back on the gate. We were up at our trailer and got a call that he was missing all night and could not be found. We came home to discover that neighbours were out searching for him.

My youngest son's friends were riding their bikes around the neighbourhood calling his

name. Other neighbours were walking, riding their bikes and driving their cars around the subdivision looking for Jak. My mother had numerous phone calls from people saying that they saw Jak.

When we came home and began searching people were stopping my husband who had his leash around his neck telling him that they saw a big brown dog and tried to catch him. Other people tried to chase him away from the highway.

This story does have a happy ending. We found our dog Jak across Highway 7 exhausted and very scared, but safe and not hurt.

We may have differences in this small community, but I have never felt more proud to live in Rockwood as I did today. Thank you to everyone who helped us find Jak. There are only tears of happiness in this home.

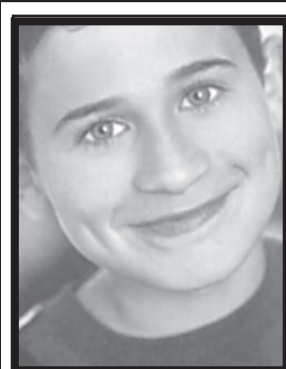
*The Durski Family*



**KNOCKING OUT CANCER:** A group of Rockwood women, known as the Knutty Knockers, are raising funds to end breast cancer by hosting a dance at Curwin's Pub on May 26. Tickets are available at The Whistle Stop, Videoplex and Curwin's. Nanci Chiasson, Jenifer Casarin, Marcia McClintock, Kimberly Rogers, and Carolyn Hill will walk in *The Weekend to End Breast Cancer*, benefiting the Princess Margaret Hospital. *Rebecca Ring Photo*

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## Soccer Report

**Under-12**  
CNC Machining - 8  
Band World - 1  
CNC goals: Jessie Keough, Patrick Scordia, Marcus Miller, Ryan Elliott, Ryan Warrington (3). Band World goals: Matthew Grabauskas.

# DANCE

Proceeds to Breast Cancer Research

**Saturday May 26, 2007**

**8pm**

**Curwins Pub  
Rockwood**

**D.J. - Silent Auction - Door Prizes \$10 Per person**

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## OPP Auction Saturday

In the market for a bicycle? How about a diamond ring? Wedding season, after all, is just around the corner and the County of Wellington holds its police auction at the Rockwood OPP office this Saturday, May 26.

The auction starts at 1 p.m. Viewing begins at 11 a.m.

On the block are items seized or recovered in 2006, whose owners haven't been found.

If the bidding makes you hungry, there's also a barbeque - a fundraiser for the Crime Stoppers program. Items to be auctioned include: 60 Bicycles and miscellaneous property including jewellery, tools and sporting goods.