

Drug abuse internet youth youth crime statistics

Grassroots effort grows to include internet site

By **WILMA BLOKHUIS**
Special to The Champion

What began as a grassroots effort to combat drug and alcohol abuse among teens has developed into an Internet site.

From the initial idea contained in a letter from Dick Cave and his wife Sally Leppard, co-chairs of an Oakville Community Consultation Committee, a coalition was formed to address prevention and treatment for substance abuse, and the role of law enforcement for abusers.

Within that coalition are four work groups, one of which was given the task of developing an Internet web site for Halton on substance abuse.

Halton's 'Substance Abuse Prevention Tool Kit: Be Part of the Game Plan' is now reality. The interactive web site was officially launched recently with representatives of the various participating groups expressing their satisfaction with a job well done.

The new Internet site is the first of its kind in Ontario.

The 'Tool Kit' can be accessed on the Internet at: <http://substanceabuse.region.halton.on.ca>

For those without Internet access, there is a book titled 'Be Part of the Game Plan: A Tool

Kit for Halton Community' available. Both the Internet site and book contain statistics on substance abuse among youth, information on what action can be taken to prevent this abuse, and a listing of community resources and who to contact for help.

About a year ago, Mr. Cave and Ms Leppard sent letters expressing their concerns over teenage drug and alcohol abuse to Joyce Savoline, chair of Halton Region. They had noticed an increase in substance abuse among high school students.

Few statistics

Mr. Cave also complained about the lack of statistics kept regarding youth crime and substance abuse. At the time only regional statistics were kept for all crimes committed — there were no separate statistics kept on crimes committed by youth.

"The link between poor health, substance abuse and crime is a potentially significant issue," he said, "and no real statistics were available at the time, and still not today."

Since then, the Halton Regional Police Service has changed its record keeping and now keeps statistics on youth crime in Halton, says Ean

Algar, deputy chief. About 1,600 youth crimes were committed in Halton last year, he said.

Deputy Chief Algar explained the Halton Police support the web initiative, describing it as an investment towards combating youth substance abuse and crime.

"We can save \$7 for every dollar spent on recidivism prevention," said the deputy chief.

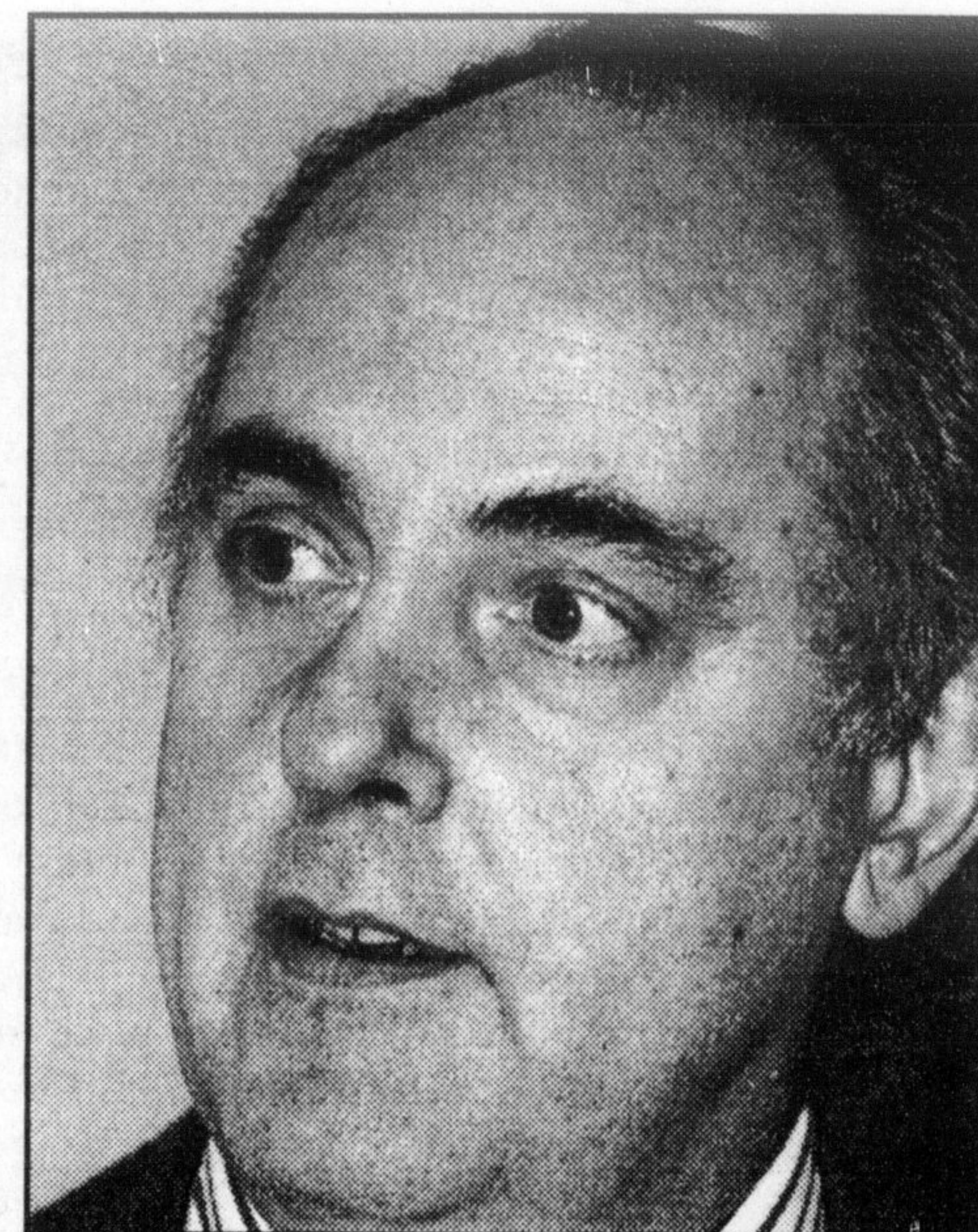
According to the introduction to the 'Tool Kit' web site, drug and alcohol abuse influence the lives of 74 per cent of Ontario's population, and costs the province about \$9.2 billion for health care, law enforcement and lost labour productivity.

Support for this initiative also came from youth themselves."

Drug abuse up

Drug use among teenagers has been increasing during the 1990s," said Dr. Bob Nosal, chief medical officer for Halton. "Many have experimented with substances without any adverse effects. But some have consumed alcohol and drugs in amounts that cause them serious harm."

Ms Savoline spoke of the work group's energy to be able to launch the 'Tool Kit' web site in so little time.



Dick Cave

"I have seen many initiatives but not one where the people were quite so committed as this one," said Ms Savoline.

Concern over drug abuse resulted in the formation of a coalition of about 40 people who have met monthly since January. Involved with the development of this 'Tool Kit' were, among others, the Halton Regional Health Department, Halton's two boards of education, the Addiction Research Foundation, the Halton Regional Police Service, youth groups and politicians.

All work was done in-house at Halton Region, resulting in minimal costs.

For information, call Mary Tabak at the Halton Regional Health Department at 825-6060 Ext. 7825; TTY 827-9833.

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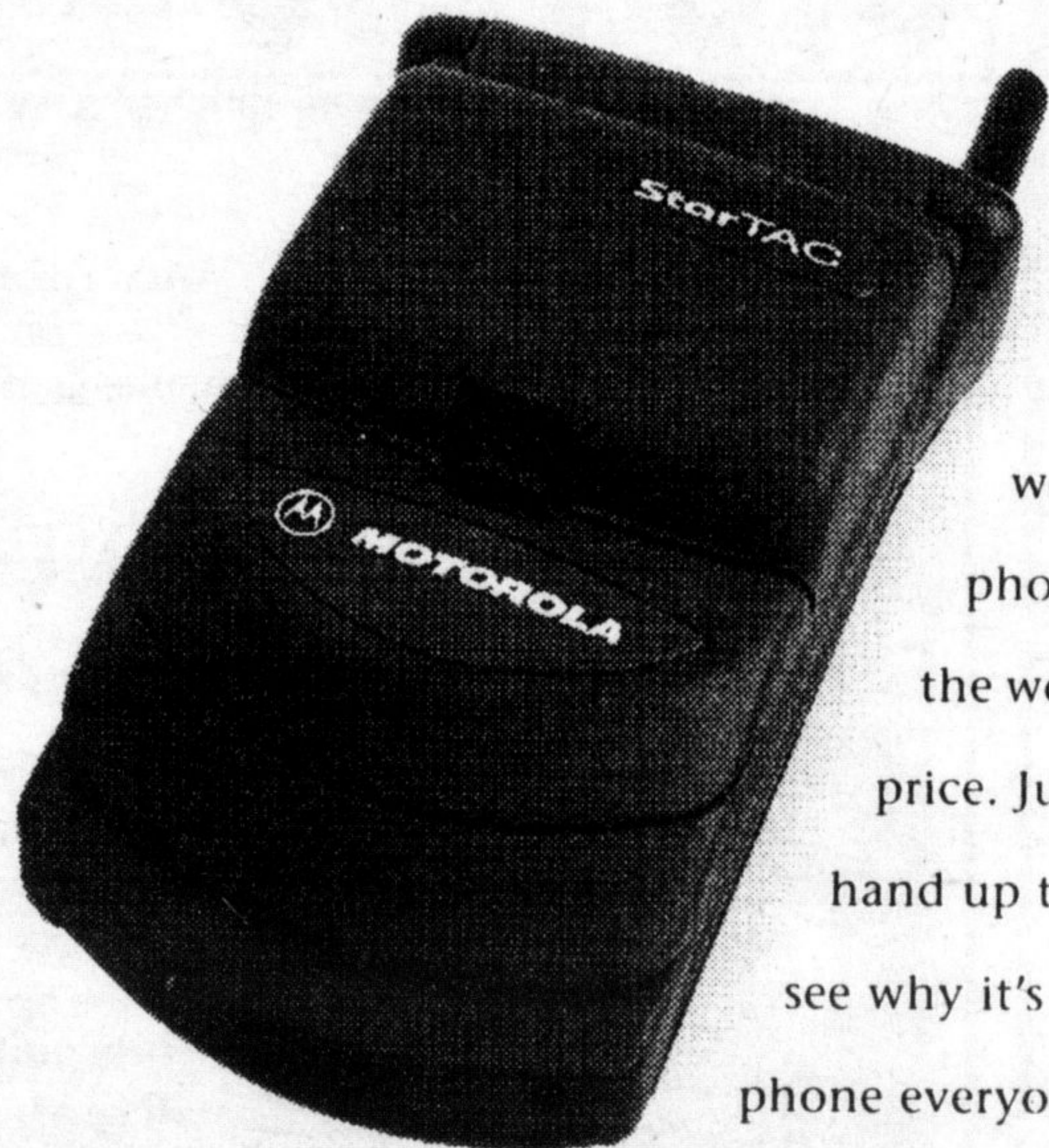
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