



SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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The big push is on for a skateboard haven

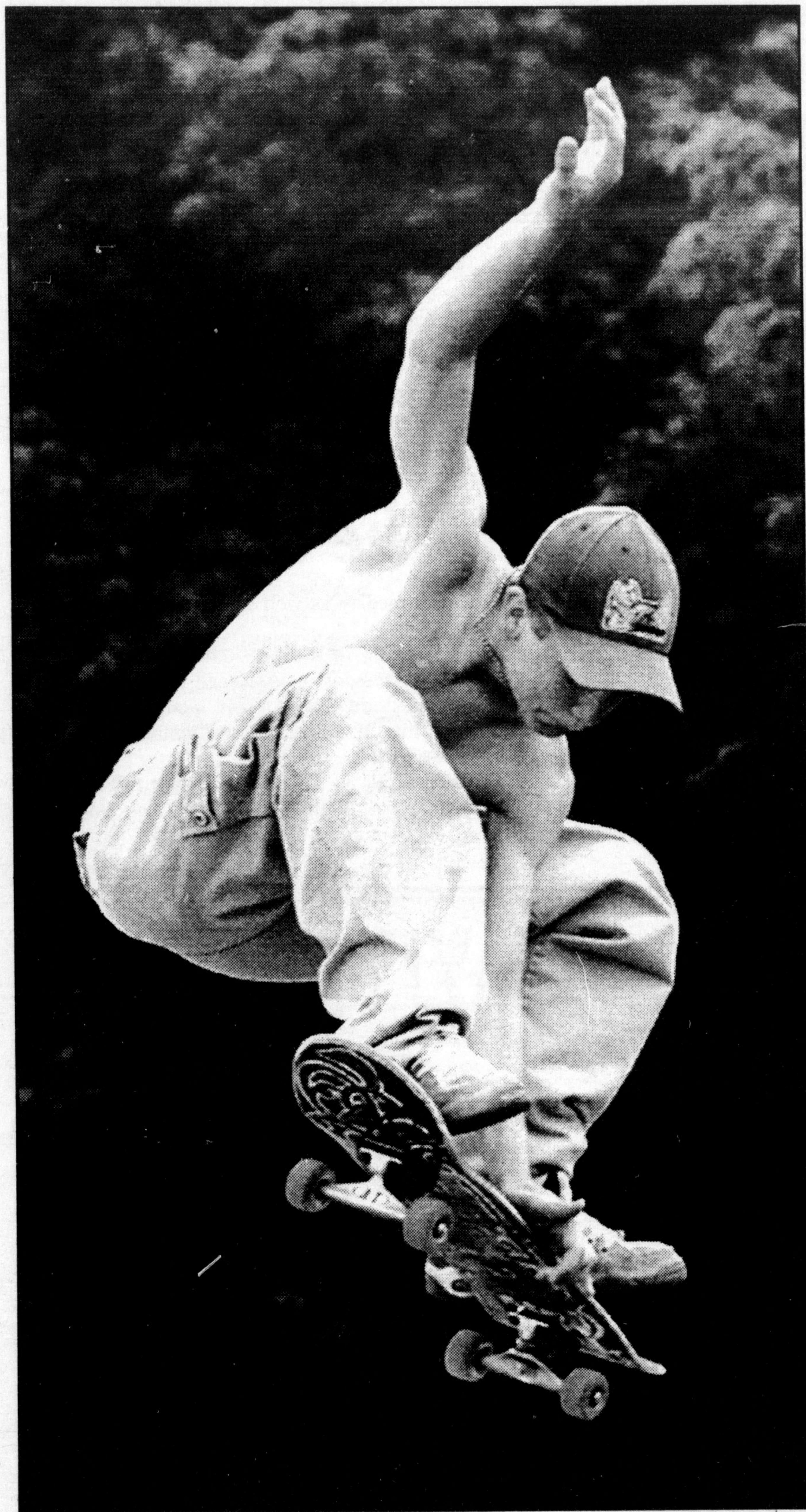


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Mark Nayler, 16, is among hundreds of local youths in town who're anxious for a permanent skateboarding park to be built. If all goes according to plan, he won't have to wait much longer.

By STEVE LeBLANC

The Champion

Imagine if you will children being ridiculed for playing catch or harassed for kicking around a soccer ball.

Pretty ludicrous, wouldn't you say?

But according to local youth advocates that's exactly what is happening to those involved in the latest athletic craze — skateboarding.

"These kids are being kicked off plaza parking lots, street corners and just about everywhere else around town," said Matt Burger, proprietor of Spokes 'N' Slopes. "Some of them have even been fined by police."

Through his downtown business, the local sports dealer has received countless complaints from young skateboarders who're fed up with all the hassles and obstacles associated with their favourite pastime.

This public outcry has prompted him to initiate a drive to establish a year-round skate park within Milton. The campaign has grown like wildfire since its spring inception and is expected to culminate in a brand new facility this fall.

Mr. Burger — together with municipal officials and service clubs — is looking at a permanent facility being constructed in an unoccupied building beside Charley Fitzwhiskey's on Ontario Street.

While other locations are being looked at as well this vacant site holds enough room for a 4,000 square foot park, the majority of which would be situated indoors.

"There's no official deadline for the park, but we'd like to have it up and running before the winter," said Mr. Burger. "Though it'll be generally thought of as a skateboard park, it'll be used by BMX riders and in-line skaters as well."

Lots of kids involved

"When you think that in town more kids do one of these three activities than play organized baseball, soccer and football combined it's high time somebody found them something."

One local resident who feels exactly the same way is Milton Jaycees president Jamie Krane, who this spring discovered that his organization and Mr. Burger were spearheading identical campaigns for a skateboard park.

"The Jaycees are a service club that acts in a leadership role for youth causes and I thought we had a responsibility to address this need," Mr. Krane said. "So we got together with Mr. Burger and have since formed a skateboard park committee."

The Jaycees' involvement began earlier this year after the Town of Milton reduced its skateboard park budget from \$80,000 to \$20,000.

Though realizing the Town's decision was based on serious financial constraints, Mr. Krane said what was left was merely "a token gesture."

"What were they going to do with that amount, run some more studies? I knew then that the private sector



"I knew then that the private sector had to get involved for this thing to fly."

— JAMIE KRANE

had to get involved for this thing to fly."

With the Town's allocated funds the committee has purchased a set of ramps that will be situated in the Memorial Arena parking lot this summer.

While youngsters use this make-shift park, local residents and business owners will help raise funds for the permanent facility.

May approach council

Between fundraising events and individual donations a few thousands dollars has already been collected while the committee is considering a proposal to municipal council for a \$25,000 interest-free loan from the reserve fund.

In order to recoup some of the expense, skateboard park goers will be charged an admission fee of \$6 to \$7 a day.

This, Mr. Krane said, is quite reasonable compared to out-of-town parks like Toronto's Rampage, which costs \$12 daily to use.

"The park will be non-profit. This modest admission fee will just help us pay for some of the operating costs," Mr. Krane said.

Added Mr. Burger, "Nobody seems to have any problems with what we'll be charging."

Part of admission fees will go towards providing park supervision, which will not only help ensure safety but also, according to Mr. Burger, keep it from becoming "an indoor turf for certain kids."

He described the skateboard park as the biggest athletic need in Milton right now. Many skaters, like 10-year-old Michael Marinario, agree.

Chased away

"I'm very anxious for the skateboard park to be built," he said. "I skate almost everyday but my friends and I get chased out of parking lots, even the one in front of our apartment building."

"A skateboard park will be a lot more challenging than the little ramps kids make in their garage."

Perhaps the greatest indication of the demand for a skateboard park was seen last week when more than 100 enthusiasts challenged ramps at Rotary Park during Canada Day festivities.

"There isn't one businessperson or resident in town that's not in favour of this project," said Mr. Burger.

The next big fundraiser in support of the skateboard park will be a giant garage sale slated for Saturday, Aug. 1 at E.C. Drury High School.

To make an individual donation, call Mr. Krane at 878-2955 or Mr. Burger at 876-7676.

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