

Amnesty International comes to Milton for public info night

By LISA CARTWRIGHT

The Champion

Amnesty International proves the pen is truly mightier than the sword.

By the simple act of writing letters, Amnesty International (AI) has helped people throughout the world get released from jail or receive humane treatment while in custody.

"When the first 200 letters arrived, I was given my clothes back," said one Prisoner of Conscience (POC) in a media release from AI. "After the next 200 letters, my food improved."

AI said as more letters arrived, the prisoner's case was reviewed and he was released.

AI was formed in 1961 to prevent human rights abuse. Since its inception, the group has grown to include more than one million members in 162 countries and territories.

AI has been in Canada for 27 years and has about 67,000 members.

The organization has four goals including freeing all POCs who are jailed because of their beliefs, ethnic original, sex, colour or language. (AI will only help those who have not used, or called for violence.)

It also wants to ensure prisoners receive a fair trial in a reasonable time, that the death penalty, torture and other cruel treatments are abolished and that executions and disappearances stop, said Rebecca Walters, a Milton resident who belongs to the Oakville Community Group.

To inform people about AI, the Oakville chapter will host an information night Tuesday from 7 to 9 p.m. in the Loblaws Community Room (Upstairs at Loblaws).

"Amnesty began because one person spoke out," Ms Walters said. "After hearing what we have to say, you may decide to lend your support to this important work."

Amnesty International helps POCs by writing letters to government officials. AI's research department, funded by members, investigates human rights abuses. Once the information is gathered, the organization assigns the case to one or more groups.

The groups receive a case file that includes information about the person as well as his arrest, what members should ask for and whom they should write to.



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Rebecca Walters, a Milton resident and member of the Oakville Community Group of Amnesty International, holds up the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Amnesty's goal is to help stop human rights abuses.

Ms Walters said while Amnesty provides a sample letter, the organization requests members write a personal note, politely asking for the release or humane treatment of the POCs.

The group still handwrites letters because AI's research department has found that government officials respond faster to regular letters than email, she said. Depending on the situation, it may take several months to several years before a POC is released.

"Sometimes they never are," she said.

If a group has been writing for a case for a while, AI may transfer the case elsewhere.

The Oakville group has writing letters for the last 17 years. Since its inception, it has written letters on behalf of 16 people, all of who were released within two years of writing.

For more information, visit AI's website at www.amnesty.ca or www.amesty.org or call Ms Walters at 876-4071.

The Champion's Lifestyles section will be published next Friday. This section runs in every second Friday edition.

Halton Healthcare
S.E.R.V.I.C.E.S.

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A community project sponsored by
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Dateline

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Track 2000 BMX hosts its first annual **Open House and Swap Shop** from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The event takes place on the northwest corner of Britannia and Trafalgar roads behind the Drumquin ball diamonds. Everyone is encouraged to bring out their old mountain, BMX or road bikes and set up a sales area. Admission is free. For further information, contact Nicky at 873-3018 or Dave at 812-7860.

Sunday Apr. 30

The Halton-Peel Branch of the **Ontario Genealogical Society** hosts its regular meeting in the lower level of Chinguacousy Branch Library, 150 Central Park Dr., in Brampton. Guest speaker Jane McNamara addresses the topic of using city and rural directories for Canadian research. Visitors are welcome. Call 458-1031 for more information.

The Milton Youth Chorus serves up **Spring Tea** and entertainment for all at St. Paul's United Church from 2 to 5 p.m. The cost is \$5 per person. Proceeds benefit the group's trip to Moncton 2000.

Monday May 1

The **Halton Hills Quilters Guild** meets at Centennial Middle School in Georgetown at 7:15 p.m. For more information, contact Geri Kunica at 878-3787.

Walking is good for you. Join Ken and Treasa Lamb at 1:30 p.m. at the Milton Seniors' Activity Centre, 500 Childs Dr., every Monday for an easy one to two-hour stroll along the Bruce Trail.

Resume, Cover Letter, and Contact Card Workshops are now available at the Milton Human Resource Centre. Sign up for a one-to-one session and receive a finished product for each. Call 876-9828 for class times.

Women's chorus A Cappella Showcase presents its **Contest Preview Show** at E.C. Drury High School at 8 p.m. Admission is free. Contact Hilary at 876-1870 for more information.

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