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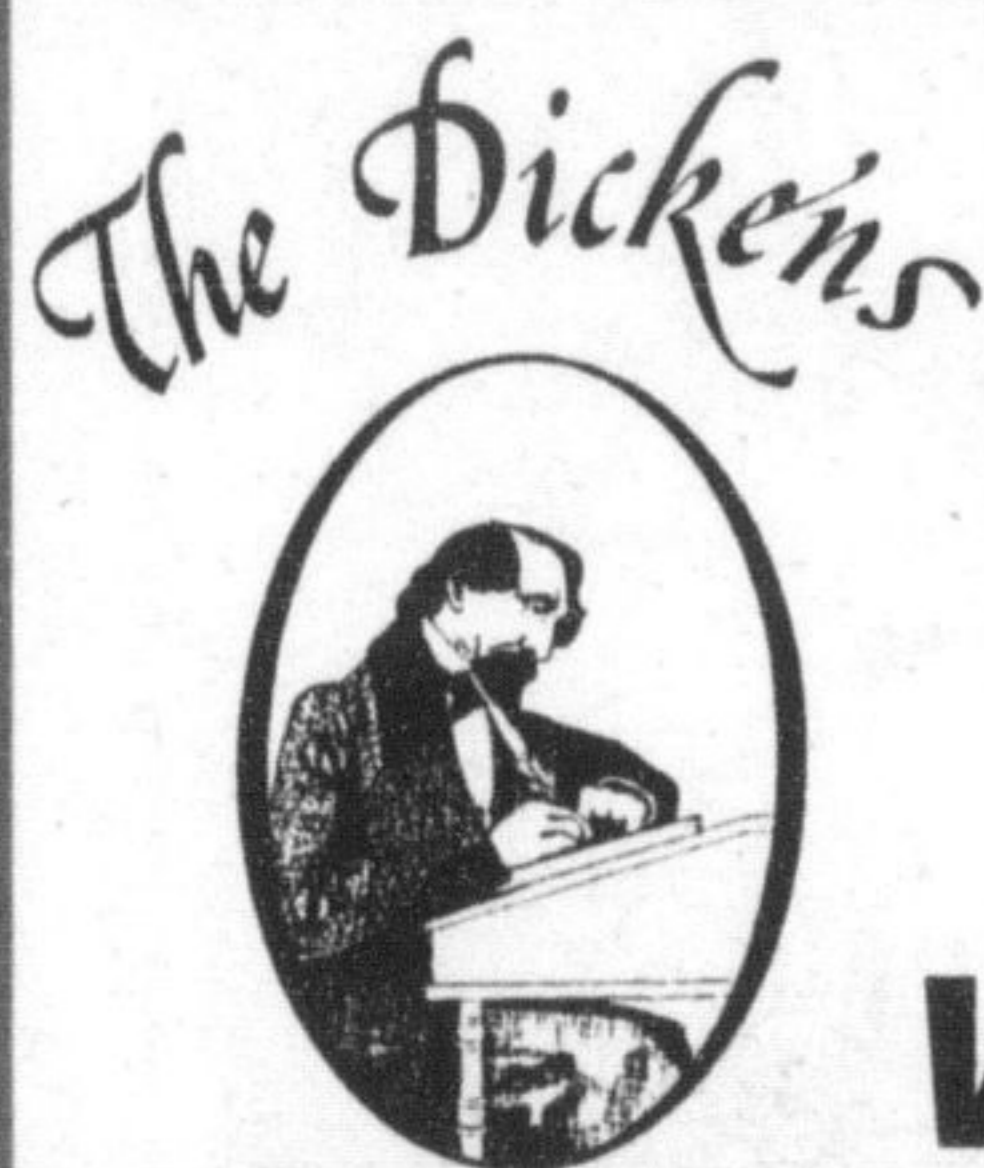
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Lifestyles

Milton's women-only triathlon growing by leaps and bounds

By STEVE LeBLANC
The Champion

Women-only triathlons may be ready to blossom across the province, but their roots will always be firmly entrenched in Milton.

Initial planting was done seven years ago by Tina Braam — who while never intimidated by mixed-gender competitions herself, knew that many ladies were.

Her brainchild — inspired by a longing for more women to become athletically active and, subsequently, gain more confidence — has been picking up steam since its 1995 inception and this year expanded beyond the boundaries of its original stomping ground at Kelso Conservation Area.

"This year there was a (women-only) triathlon in Kincardine as well," said Ms Braam. "And we've been approached by some ladies who want to get another one started in their community. It would be great if we could eventually have a series. It's possible."

Locally, Milton's women-only triathlon has been growing by leaps and bounds since its inaugural year. Participation has increased nearly six-fold — from 70 in 1995 to just over 400 during 2001 festivities this past Sunday — and competition now includes two different distance triathlons plus a duathlon, for those who like to avoid the water.

The Labour Day weekend event has even attracted major sponsors as of late. Acton's Twin Lab lent its financial support last year while taking over the honours this time around was Weight Watchers.

Ms Braam has been a topflight triathlete for many years now — regularly competing at both national and world championships — but seems to get as much satisfac-



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

The annual women-only triathlon at Kelso is getting bigger every year.

tion seeing novice competitors achieve their goals as she does her own.

"It's great convincing them that they can do it. It's like the movie Field of Dreams. Build it and they will come."

Echoing those sentiments was co-organizer Sue Leeder — an avid triathlete herself who jumped on board when the grassroots event was first being conceived.

Remarked Ms Leeder, "I got involved to

help get these women believing in themselves, to create a venue where they're doing something."

And it's never too late to get started, said Ms Leeder.

"We still have plenty of women in their fifties and sixties. We didn't have anyone in their seventies this year, but we've always got a plaque ready just in case," she explained. "We've also got a lot of mothers and daughters who compete together, which is really great."

While the event focuses on participation rather than competition, it has been the breeding ground for many success stories.

"There's two women from Georgetown who really stand out for me," said Ms Braam. "One did her first triathlon in Milton just three years ago and this summer went to the world championships. Another started at the same time and was recently top 15 overall in an ironman competition."

"Sure these women were athletically incline to start, but they'd still never done a triathlon before. That's phenomenal."

Of course not every women's progress is quite so dramatic, but being able to measure one's own improvement from year to year is — according to organizers — what keeps many coming back.

Said Ms Braam, "Team sports certainly have their place, but with individual events like this it's about you personally, what you're capable of. It's something to identify yourself with. I think that's attractive to many women."

And though there'll always be some women out there who believe they're not capable of tackling athletic endeavours like the triathlon, a morning spent watching friends or family members compete is often enough to convince them otherwise.

"We never push them. They end up realizing on their own that they can do it," said Ms Leeder.

Do you really have to go, honey?

There's no place like home. Unless your kids move out.

My youngest daughter went off to school this week, selfishly leaving her father all by himself. You try to raise kids properly and this is what they do to you.

It wasn't long ago, at least it doesn't seem long ago, that both of my daughters started kindergarten. Then they started high school. Then they finished high school.

All in a flash. Where did the time go? How is it possible for things to happen that quickly?

I wasn't ready for my kids to move out. As far as I was concerned, they could stay at home forever. What's the big hurry?

It's not like when I was a teenager. My parents couldn't wait for me to move out. In fact, they pushed me along so I wouldn't dilly dally.

I always thought that was the strangest thing. I was the only one of my brothers and sisters who wanted to stay at home. One joined the army at 16, another went to Europe and another went to play hockey at



On the loose

with MURRAY TOWNSEND

a university in the United States. Here, I was as happy as can be and they pushed me out the door and locked it behind me.

Oddly, this will be the first time in my life that I'll be on my own. It's not easy getting used to. All of a sudden, I can do whatever I want, whenever I want.

That's a nice thing to have in theory, but in practice it's not so great. It makes me feel far less useful and meaningful. When I think back, I find that I didn't mind so much driving the kids around, or getting up early for school, or making lunches, or cleaning up their rooms, or having lots of kids around. I'd even go so far as to say I

enjoyed them.

I have to rethink a lot of things now, too. Food, for example. I've always bought the bags of milk, but now they'd just go bad. Do they sell half loaves of bread? Can I order the dinner for one-half at the Chinese take-outs?

When I go grocery shopping I have to get used to thinking of just what I want, although I won't mind passing by the Melba toast or rice cakes. And I won't have to hide the really good treats anymore that I wanted for myself.

I suppose cleaning will be easier, although I lost my trump card. When my daughter wanted to use the car I used to be able to say, "Sure, after you clean up the kitchen."

Even television won't be the same. If one of us wasn't home, we could tape our favourite shows for the other. I have never and likely never will be able to figure out how to set the timer on the VCR.

I'm not the only one who will be suffering. The cat likes both daughters better

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