

Lifestyles

Cheerleading evolving and expanding locally

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

Cheerleaders may still act as morale boosters for football and basketball teams — but these days, they're hardly restricted to the sidelines.

In recent years, cheerleading squads across the country — picking up on the momentum generated by their south-of-the-border counterparts — have done as much actual competing as half-time entertaining.

And nowhere is that more evident than Milton District High School. Led by longtime coach Andy Cecchini, MD's program has undergone as much evolution as the sport itself — and now ranks among the top teams in Ontario.

A silver medal at last spring's provincials, the second in just four years, is testament to that.

The Mustangs' success hasn't come without a great deal of hard work though, stressed returning staff advisor Wendy Beriault. Local cheerleaders, she said, put forth a level of commitment that's on par with most — if not all — other teams.

"It's a 12-month a year activity. The girls practice two or three times a week," explained Ms Beriault.

That's certainly contributed to the team's increased respectability throughout the school. Another factor is the level of athleticism required to truly thrive in cheerleading — which has skyrocketed over the past decade.

"We use to think of cheerleaders as just girls standing on the sidelines shaking pom-poms, but most of them now are at the elite-gymnast level," Ms Beriault said.

"It's so much more than pyramids. It's tumbling, tosses and back flips.

"They (cheerleaders) really push the envelope these days. In fact, school boards have now put cheerleading on the same level as football in terms of athleticism and risk of injury."

That may surprise some, given that cheerleaders aren't exactly prone to separated shoulders or broken ankles like those sustained regularly on the gridiron.



File photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Milton District High School cheerleaders celebrate last season's silver-medal finish at the provincials. In recent years cheerleading's level of commitment, athleticism and recognition across Ontario and abroad has risen dramatically.

But that's not to say cheerleading is completely safe, either.

Said Ms Beriault, "We've had broken noses and other injuries. It happens."

Now that MD's cheerleaders have climbed the provincial ladder — or at least reached its second-last rung — they'll have the opportunity to test their mettle on the national front. This spring will mark the start of a Canadian high school cheerleading championship, and if the local ladies can match last season's provincial performance, they'll surely be part of the inaugural showcase.

"It's really exciting that cheerleading is being recognized at the national level like this," said Ms Beriault. "It's definitely our goal to try and get there."

The Mustangs may not be seriously challenged by any local counterpart this year, but they don't hold a monopoly on Milton

cheerleading either.

At least not since Tuesday, which marked the official launch of a squad at E.C. Drury. While still in its infancy, the program does have a few members with previous cheerleading experience like Alysha Kobow — who attended a training course in Rochester, New York this past summer. Furthermore, local dance instructor and ex-Buffalo Bills cheerleader Ronda Copeland has been enlisted to assist the team alongside coach Paige Williamson.

With just eight members out right now, Drury won't be going to competitions just yet. Nevertheless, Ms Williamson is pleased with the program's upstart and hopes to build its ranks and skill-level over the next few years.

"We're very enthusiastic about the program starting," said the former high school cheerleader.

You've forced me to think about Christmas shopping

I'm mad at some people in Milton. Already they've put up Christmas lights, which has forced me to start thinking about Christmas shopping.

I love everything about Christmas, except the shopping. If it were up to me, I'd get everybody together except for the kids and agree that I won't buy them anything and they won't buy me anything.

The only problem with that is that I love getting presents.

I mean I really love it. I'm one of those few people who will admit it is better to receive than to give. So shoot me. I bet I'd be in the majority

if we were all honest.

I see my name on a fancy wrapped present and I get all tingly. I can't wait to open it and see what it is.

Whatever it is, I like it, It doesn't matter how much it costs. Socks?

Couldn't be happier. A tie? Woohooooo. In fact, my most memorable presents are ones that cost nothing.

I wouldn't mind the giving part if I could give decent presents. I'm lousy at it.

Every year since I can remember I have planned to find unique, exciting gifts. Every year I've failed. When it gets down to crunch time



with **MURRAY TOWNSEND**

I'm grabbing anything half decent off the shelf just to get it over with, and I'm on the phone begging people to tell me what they want for Christmas.

On the loose

Some people are really good at this and even enjoy the process. As far as I'm concerned these are good people who care about others. I want to be just like them.

This year, after seeing those darned Christmas lights, I put a new plan into motion. I had a couple hours to kill before a hockey game, about 100 miles from Milton.

Before leaving home, I brought a pen and a pad of paper.

I prefer buying in Milton as much as possible, so I was going to go through this other mall and write down all the things I was going to buy.

• see **MY NEW** on page 19

YAHOOZ!

MUSIC GRILL

Live to Air

Fridays with

ALL HIT SUPERSTATION

energyfm

Every Tuesday and Wednesday ... 20¢ Wings

Thursday Night ... Live Band All Requests

Saturday Night Retro Party ... No Cover ...

\$2.50 Specials

Sunday FREE Pool All Day

121 CHISHOLM DRIVE ■ MILTON ■ 905-693-9397

Daily Lunch and Dinner Specials