

# High schools thinking twice about graduation parties due to concerns of liability

By **MELANIE CUMMINGS**  
Special to *The Champion*

High school graduates organizing year-end parties have liability on their minds more so than what to wear and how to get to the party in style.

Investigating insurance policies is the first order of business for White Oaks Grad Committee organizers Flynn Bevan, Ankita Modi and Jordon Veschesler.

The trio's eyes were opened to the legal implications of their party-planning at a workshop held last Tuesday at Rattlesnake Point Golf Club.

Organized by the Halton Region Health Department, it was the third year running for the workshop entitled 'Party in the Right Spirit'.

The morning information sessions focused on decreasing risky behaviours especially around alcohol use at much-hyped graduation events.

The three students have planned a graduation party for July 2 at the Atlantis Pavilion in Ontario Place. So far they have sold 145 tickets to the event and because most of the guests will be 19 years old, there will be a cash bar.

"I think we'll have to go back to the owner of the hall and ask about

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their responsibilities and ours for ensuring there's no drinking and driving, or overuse," said Ms Bevan.

According to Halton's substance abuse program manager Kathy Miller, many high schools have pulled out of organizing festive events for fear of liability. White Oaks High School in Oakville is one such example — which is why its grad organizing committee has booked the Ontario Place venue.

### Potential for legal action

In Ms Miller's presentation on liability she provided existing court cases to demonstrate the impact such parties have had on some hosts and organizers.

A 17-year-old who drank too much alcohol at a home party, vomited and then found a bed in the house to sleep in. She was later found dead from alcohol poisoning.

The parents of the host were found liable because despite their best efforts in keeping the party small — with only 50 invited guests — and hiring a security

guard to take the graduates' keys at the door as a prevention for drinking and driving, they did provide alcohol to the partygoers.

It's illegal to provide alcohol to people under the age of 19 in Ontario.

"A lot of people don't realize alcohol poisoning is a risk — 4,000 students die in the U.S. annually of alcohol poisoning (there are no Canadian statistics) which is more than die of drunk driving," said Ms Miller.

In another case, a 17-year-old was left a quadriplegic following a fight he started while drunk at a party at his best friend's farm. Neither the host nor his father provided alcohol at this party, but 300 people attended. The farmer was found liable and ordered to pay \$700,000 simply because he was deemed the "host" of the party.

Following Ms Miller's presentation, the threesome from White Oaks High School immediately fished out a pamphlet on the subject of liability insurance that was included in each of the packages given to the 100 students who attended the seminar. "We're thinking we may need to get legal advice on this event we're putting together," said Ms Modi.

## CATC fundraiser Apr. 2

To help raise funds for mental health services for children, the Children's Assessment and Treatment Centre (CATC) of Halton will host a fundraiser April 2.

The event will be held at 190 King William St. in Hamilton. The fundraiser

is a joint venture with Theatre Aquarius of Hamilton.

A silent auction will begin at 6:30 p.m. followed by the production 'Self-Help' at 8 p.m. Tickets cost \$40.

For information, call (905) 634-2347, ext. 242.

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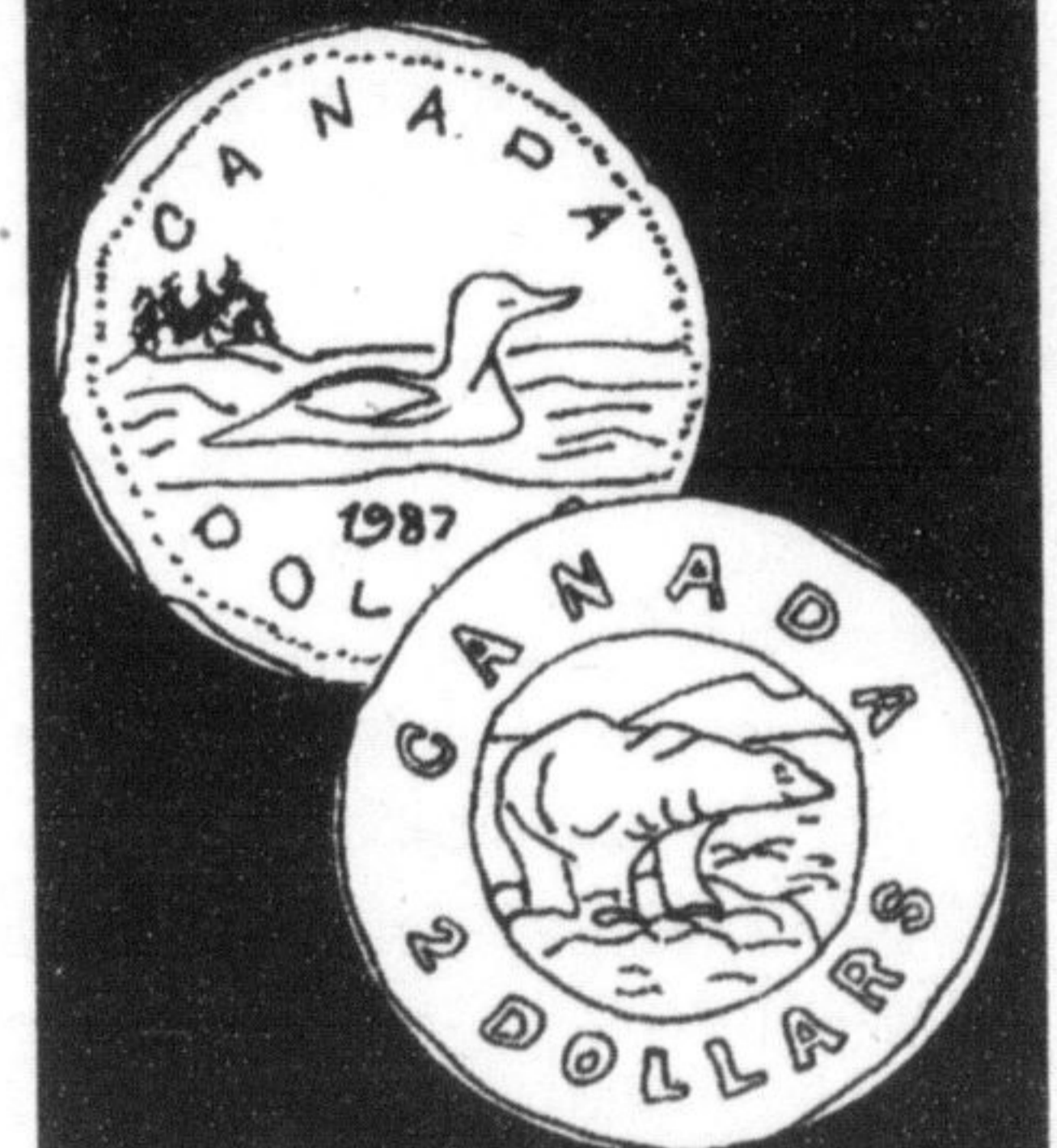
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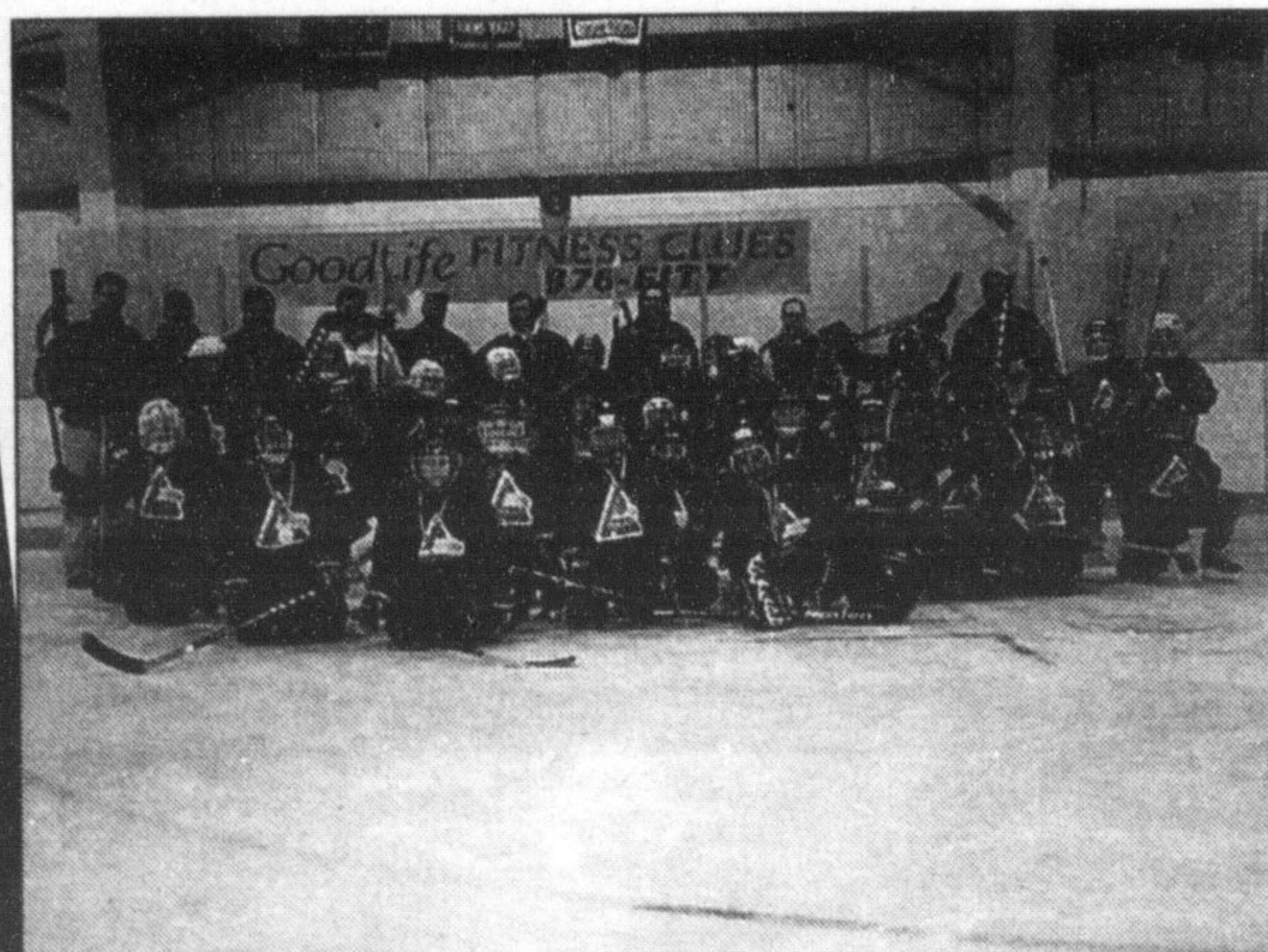
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