

# Anti-smoking message on screen in Burlington

By **JASON MISNER**  
*The Champion*

The Halton Region Health Department hopes a unique anti-smoking public service announcement now appearing on the big screen will capture the attention of young people as they munch away on their bags of popcorn.

The 30-second spot doesn't feature today's big-name movie stars like Tom Cruise or Julia Roberts. But its message that selling or giving smokes to someone under 19 is illegal and could result in huge fines should be enough to perk their eyes and ears.

The spots started appearing before the start of every main attraction at the Famous Players movie theatre on Brant Street in Burlington the first weekend of this month. They will continue being shown until the weekend of January 1.

They alert everyone to the Tobacco Control Act, which prohibits those under-age from being sold or given cigarettes. Fines for a first conviction run as high as \$4,000.

"If you give a cigarette to a youth, you can be charged the same way as retailers," said Tony Amalfa, Halton's manager of environmental health.

"And, it's socially unacceptable for young kids to smoke and for anyone to encourage it."

Most recent statistics show that 24 per cent of Halton youth aged 12 to 19 smoke, mirroring the provincial average. The program is trying to help reduce that number by especially stopping young kids from getting their first taste of a cigarette.

"Any drop is good," Mr. Amalfa said. "We (health staff) don't have the same sort of influence that we do over the retailers because youth can bum a cigarette from each other. The age group we're targeting is 16 to 20 year olds."

The movie theatre initiative is an expansion of the six-year-old Not to Kids program. Fifteen public health units send businesses a binder of information teaching them how to spot under-age kids and recognize fake identification.

The program has an annual total budget of \$250,000 funded by the Province.

The Burlington movie theatre was chosen as part of an agreement signed with Famous Players and Galaxy cinemas on behalf of the 15 public health unit coalition, Mr. Amalfa said.

Regional health staff will visit selected showings over the next couple of weeks and will ask young people questions about the PSAs. Staff will make it worth their while to participate by giving out coupons for \$5 off their next movie admission.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is expecting this different kind of initiative to make an impact.

"It's to get their attention, hopefully, loud and clear — smoking kills and the studies back that up," said ministry spokesperson John Letherby.

According to Cancer Care Ontario, tobacco is the single biggest cause of cancer. In this province, a quarter of cancer deaths — more than 5,000 deaths each year — are due to tobacco.

The movie theatre experiment will be assessed by all health units to see how effective it was, Mr. Amalfa said.

Also, he said Halton is planning to set up advertising placards, possibly in high schools, denouncing smoking and the dangers of selling or giving butts to minors.

Details are still being ironed out, but the hope is to have it up and running in March.

Jason Misner can be reached at [jmisner@miltoncanadian-champion.com](mailto:jmisner@miltoncanadian-champion.com).

## Man charged in garage theft

A man is charged with break and enter in connection with an incident where a Milton woman watched thieves enter her garage with a crow bar.

Halton Police Det. Brian Smith said a Twiss Road resident saw two people enter her garage after a noise caused her to look outside December 13. The thieves placed \$750 worth of tools in a car and drove away, Det. Smith said.

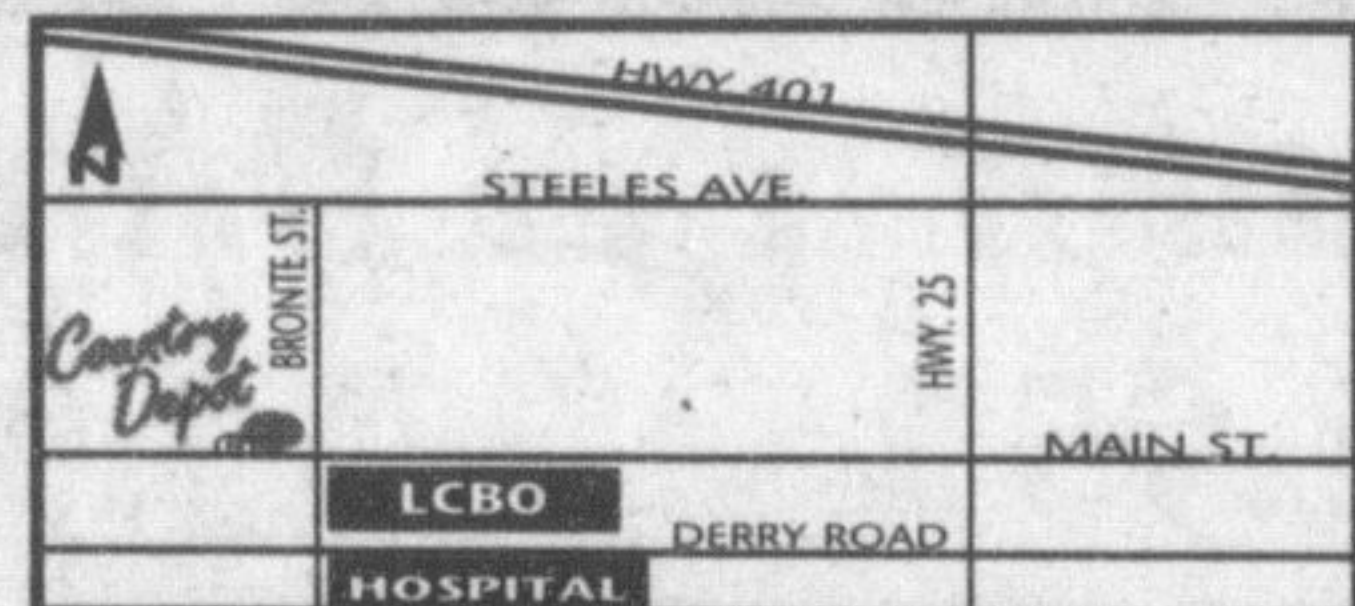
Charged is a 42-year-old Hamilton man of no fixed address.

The charges by Halton police came after Hamilton police arrested the suspect in the city in connection with possession of a stolen vehicle and plates.

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