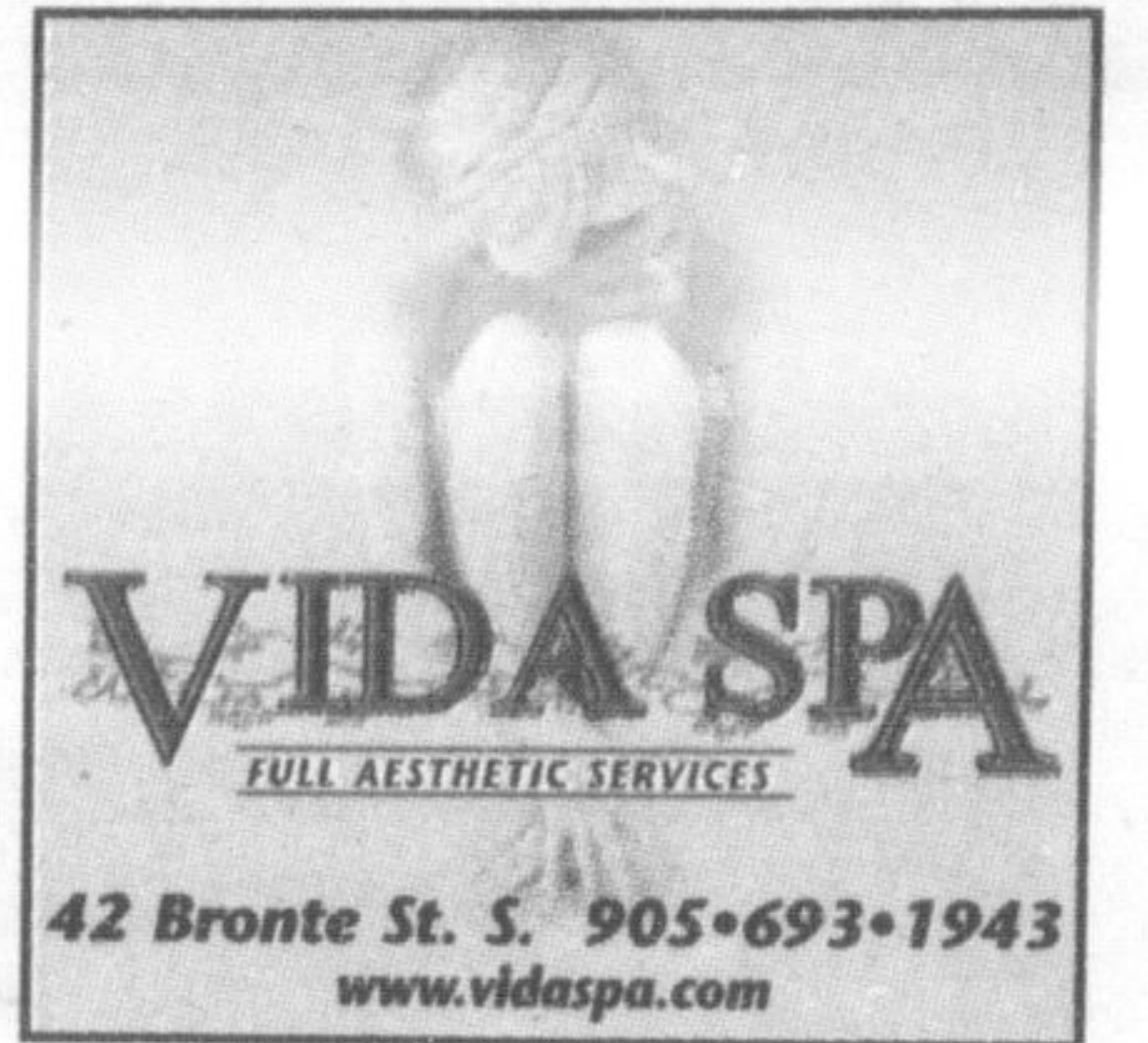


Arts & Entertainment



High school improv team quick on their feet

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**
The Champion

Johnny and Susie are both nervously getting ready for a blind date with each other.

On goes the make-up — some extra deodorant, in his case — and a spritz of perfume or cologne. The anticipation is almost tangible.

But when they meet for the first time, their expressions aren't the normal delighted or disgusted ones you might expect.

That's because they're related — through some humorous error, the brother and sister were set up with each other.

It's a pretty funny scene, and the audience is roaring with laughter, while the other teams in the competition show traces of admiration. That's because they know the team had mere seconds to come up with the clever idea.

It's a typical day of competition at the Canadian Improv Games, and drama teacher and improvisation coach Laurie Graham is beaming from the sidelines with pride at the seven students strutting their stuff.

Her team, from Milton District High School, is the underdog in the games, since they've never competed before. In fact, the team formed just months before last week's competition and advanced further than they — or anyone else — had expected.

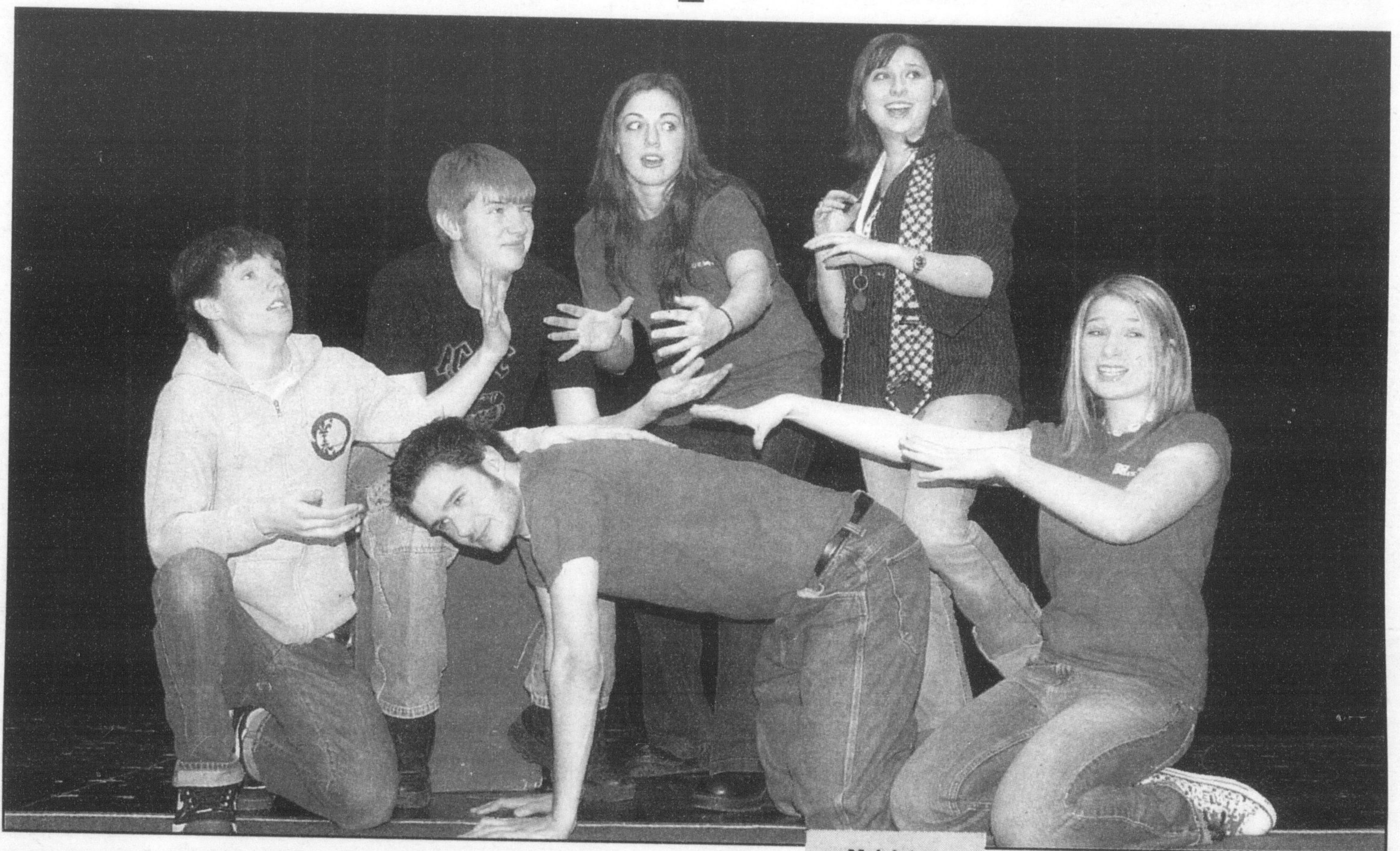
"In every situation, they were the ones who were new. They really did take it by storm," Ms Graham said.

The team's first competition was in early February, and it went on to the zone finals where it finished in fourth place. This afforded the team a spot at the Toronto region semi-finals February 23 at the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts.

It came in third out of the four teams — not bad for an inexperienced team.

"They were often the crowd favourite because they were the underdogs," Ms Graham said.

As the name suggests, in improv the participants make up a skit or activity as they go — there's little or no time for preparation, and no props. The art — made popular by the show 'Whose Line is it



Anyway?" — often yields hilarious results.

Ms Graham — an English and drama teacher at Milton District — said she'd been thinking about coaching an improv team for quite a while, and finally held tryouts at the beginning of the school year. She knew the enthusiasm would be there from students because improv is always their favourite unit in her drama class, she said.

Georgea Brooks-Hancock was one of the students who showed up for the tryouts and earned a spot on the team.

The 16-year-old said her outgoing, bubbly personality makes her well suited to the art — and her only child status means it's no hardship for her to be the centre of attention.

"I think I like it because I can be myself," she explained. "At first I was nervous, but

after a while I really got into it."

She said the team's like a family, and members eventually learned to anticipate what the others were going to say.

Although lots of fun, Georgea admitted being on the team was also a lot of work. No matter. She can't wait to start all over again next year with Ms Graham, who she said is "an excellent coach."

One of the best parts about the competition, said Georgea and Ms Graham, were the bonds they created with some of the other school teams — which came from all over the Toronto area.

When one team was performing, the other teams would sit around the stage and cheer it on, they said.

Improv is full of benefits, Ms Graham said, including the confidence it gives stu-
• see **EXPERIENCE** on page B9

Milton District High School improv team members (from left) Ryan Black, Gayton Corkett-Turk, Nik Spohr (kneeling), Kaitlyn Tuff, Mindy Moore and Georgea Brooks-Hancock run through a skit.

Photo by **GRAHAM PAINE**

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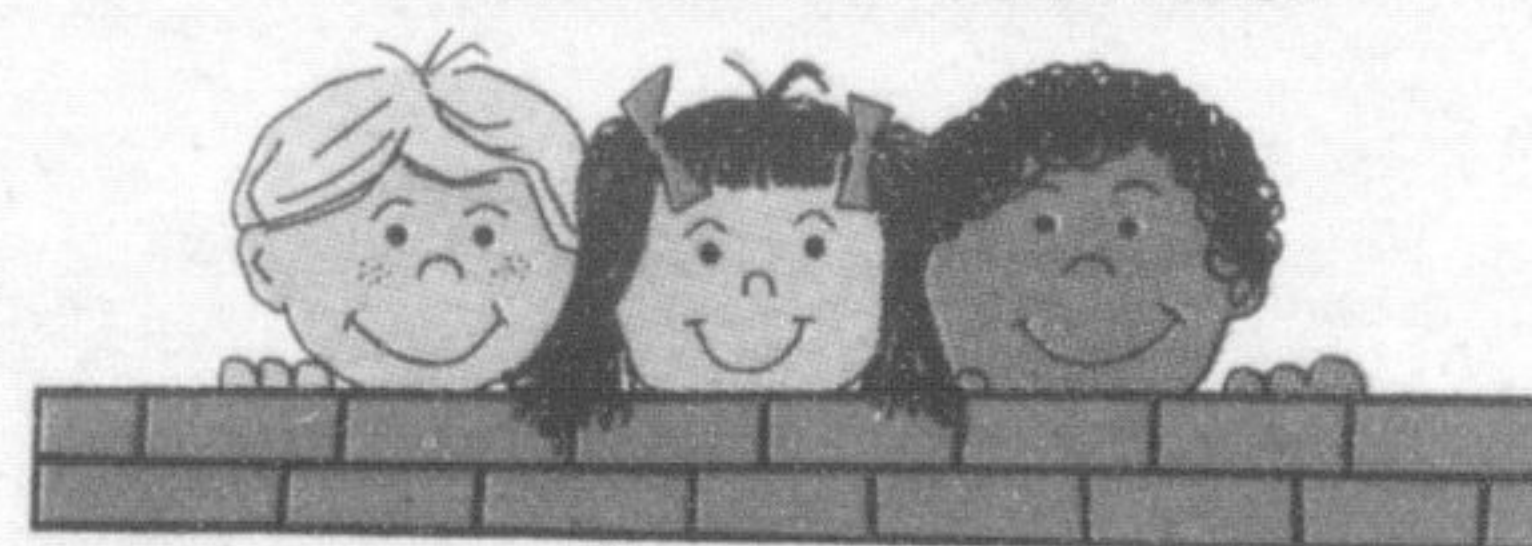
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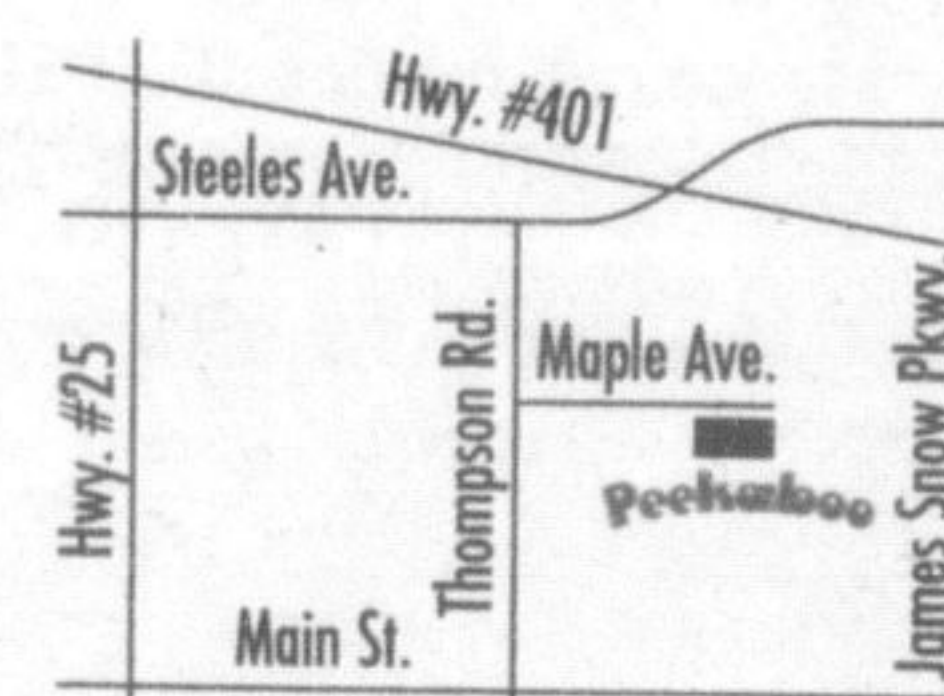


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