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COMMUNITY

Speaker 'raps' against dangers of tobacco

Cigarette companies seduce teens, says anti-tobacco activist

By Wilma Blokhuis
 SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

Shoes hang from the rafters, one pair representing each of the 44 people who die every day in Ontario from tobacco related illnesses. Bodies are outlined in the parking lot, walkways and entrance to the Sheridan Athletic Complex. Protest signs against smoking are posted everywhere.

A moment of silence was held for Heather Crowe, the Ottawa waitress who's featured in the Smoke Free Ontario ads. She died May 22 at age 61 from cancer caused by exposure to second-hand smoke over her 40-year career working in bars and restaurants.

It was World No Tobacco Day May 31, the first day the Smoke-Free Ontario Act banning smoking in all public and enclosed places took effect.

It was also the day anti-smoking crusader Samuel Allen of Orlando, Florida, came to 'rap' to some 150 kids about how 'big tobacco' seduces teens into smoking at the first annual Halton Youth Tobacco Summit held by the Halton Youth Action Team and the Halton Council on Smoking or Health.

Powerful address

In a powerful hour-long presentation complete with humour and interspersed with anti-tobacco commercials, Allen said it takes only one to two cigarettes to become addicted to nicotine.

"Each cigarette is carefully engineered to deliver nicotine," he told the youth, most of them dressed in red T-shirts identifying themselves as SWAT — Students Working Against Tobacco.

"A cigarette is not just tobacco rolled in paper," he continued, stressing it contains chemicals including ammonia to enhance the effect of the nicotine and urea (derived from urine) to boost flavour.

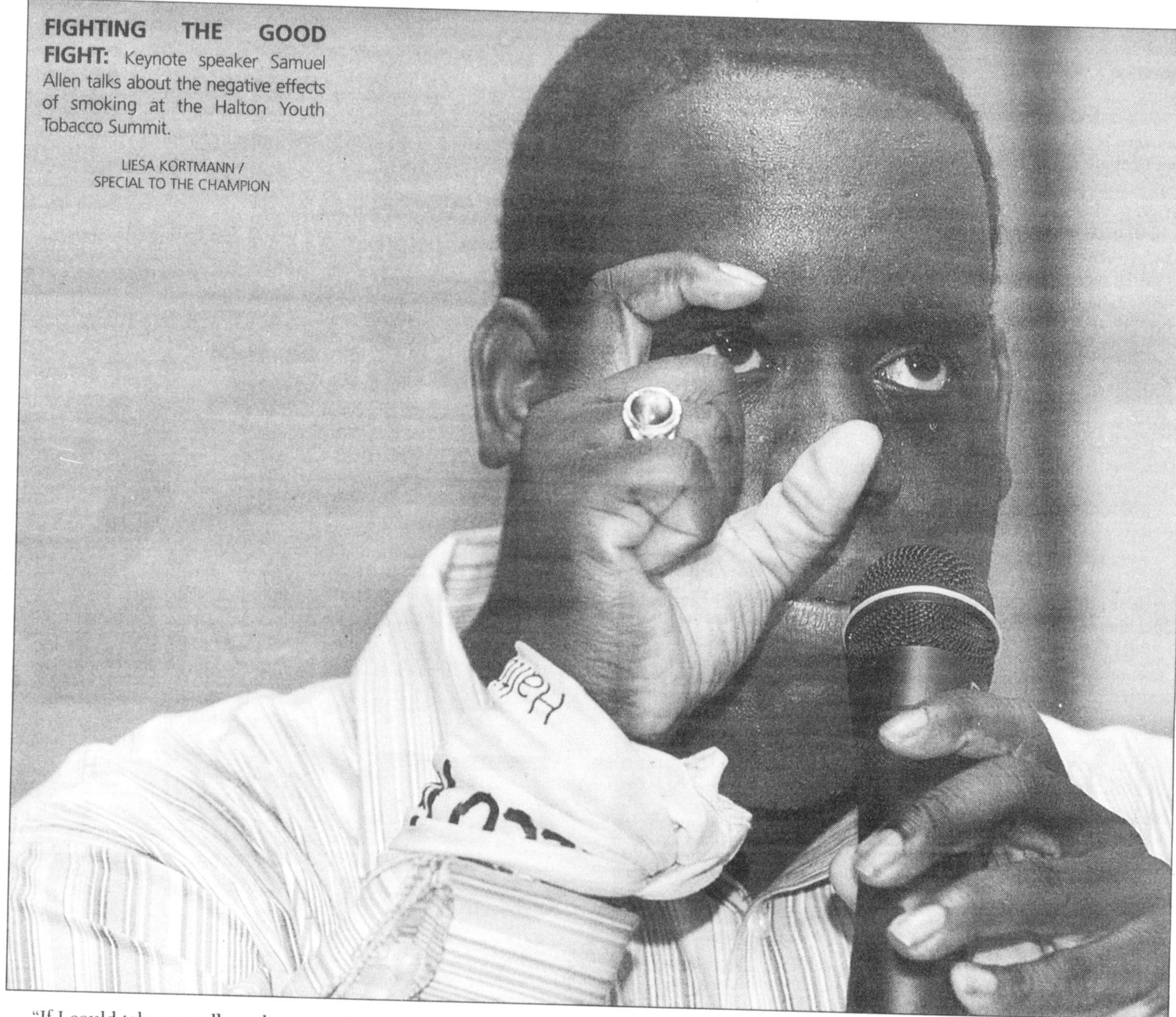
"A cigarette is designed so that the first hit is the largest legal amount of ammonia. After smoking just two cigarettes, there's an 80 per cent chance that you're hooked," continued Allen, "because nicotine gets into the blood stream and it actually changes the way you think. A lot of smokers, if given the choice between eating or smoking, are so addicted they say they would rather smoke."

Nicotine is 10 times more addictive than cocaine and five times more addictive than heroin, he said.

FIGHTING THE GOOD

FIGHT: Keynote speaker Samuel Allen talks about the negative effects of smoking at the Halton Youth Tobacco Summit.

LIESA KORTMANN /
 SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION



"If I could take a needle and extract all of the nicotine in a package of cigarettes and inject it into you, you would die," he said.

Allen, 24, has been on the road, speaking out against smoking for eight years. His crusade began while still in high school. At age 16, he was chosen by Florida Governor Lawton Chiles to attend his Youth Tobacco Summit. The brainstorming sessions led to the formation of a SWAT team at his high school and Truth, a youth empowerment group fighting 'big tobacco.' Allen was involved in creating Truth's first anti-smoking commercial. The group's campaign reduced smoking among teens by 34 per cent in middle school and 19 per cent in high school during its first year, and 54 per cent in middle school and 33 per cent in high school during its second year. Today,

Allen is a consultant and motivational speaker.

"I'm really passionate about what I do. I really hate the tobacco industry and I hope you leave with the same passion," Allen said, charging cigarette companies use deceptive and subtle marketing campaigns to sell their product — everything from using corporate colours on race cars they sponsor to sexy, colorful advertising in glossy magazines and product placement in popular movies such as The Titanic, Men in Black and five Rocky movies.

"The tobacco industry says, 'We have to make sure our product is placed in the right places,'" said Allen of the placement of cigarettes in movies to create the allure of seduction.

He also showed an ad where a couple

embraced in a kiss is subtly placed inside the flame used to light a cigarette.

"The tobacco industry is strategically plotting to get you to buy their product, a product that if used exactly as directed, as intended, will kill you."

The tobacco industry targets youth to replace adults who quit and others who die from smoking-related illness, said Allen.

"About 90 per cent of all smokers started before age 18. We have to target youth to prevent them from starting. Today's teens are tomorrow's potential smokers."

Allen said 'big tobacco' is like "a snake shedding its skin" by creating the image of being good corporate citizens by sponsoring Meals on Wheels programs and distributing water to flood victims of Hurricane Katrina.

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Programming Schedule — Tuesday, June 13 - Monday, June 19, 2006

Tuesday, June 13	Wednesday, June 14	Thursday, June 15	Friday, June 16	Saturday, June 17	Sunday, June 18	Monday, June 19
1:00pm SportZONE Live	1:00pm Halton Hills Council June 12 2006	8:00am-4:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am-4:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am-11:00am Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am-10:30am Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am-1:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA
2:00pm-6:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA	4:00pm-Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	4:00pm-Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	4:00pm-Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	11:00am Burlington Sound of Music Festival Parade (Live)	10:30pm TV Cogeco Sports: Flamboro Speedway Racing	1:00pm Halton Hills Council June 12 2006
6:30pm Optimist TV Bingo (Live)				1:00am-4:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	1:30pm-6:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	4:00pm-8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA
7:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA				4:00pm TV Cogeco Sports: Flamboro Speedway Racing	6:00pm Halton Hills Council June 12 2006	8:00pm SportsZone Live
8:00pm Auto Experts (Live)				7:00pm-Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	9:00pm-Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	9:00pm-Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA
9:00pm Halton Hills Council May 29, 2006						