

Performing arts school being proposed for Region

By Tim Whitnell
SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

Arts centres have been long sought after in Halton so why not a performing arts school in the region?

That's the question a parent of an artistic child posed to herself and then to a senior administrator with the Halton District School Board — and now she wants to find out how many other parents feel the way she does.

"We have been residents of Burlington for about 15 years and our 12-year-old daughter is an avid dancer and actress. For her to pursue ballet and acting and also thrive academically would be her dream," said Ksenija Melling.

"Upon much investigation of this topic, we have found that neighbouring school boards have such a program, ie. Peel and (west) Toronto (Etobicoke School of the Arts), but

Halton does not, and Halton students are not eligible to enter these programs in those neighbouring school boards because they are so popular," added Melling, a grade 10 Level pianist who also taught piano and once played clarinet in the Hamilton Concert Band.

Her daughter Chloe, the youngest of five kids, has been dancing since she was three and studies ballet and jazz dance with the Burlington Dance Company.

A brief correspondence and discussion she said she had with Halton board Acting Associate Director Ruth Peden convinced Melling to forge ahead with plans to take a survey of parents to gauge interest in potentially establishing a regional arts program (RAP) within the board.

"Upon discussion with members of the Halton District School Board, we were led to believe that we are certainly (eligible) to present a proposal for such a school program,"

Melling said.

"We would like to create a website for interested Halton families to add their names to in order that we may have strength in numbers when we present our case to a board meeting at the Halton District School Board."

The interest is there, she believes.

"We certainly know many other families with children who are strong in an arts capacity and have no specialty program to which they can apply.

"We are very passionate about this and feel that it would be a much-needed adjunct to the educational and arts community in Halton," she added.

"Furthermore, if students from Halton want to pursue the arts at a post-secondary level, they might not have the same advantage as someone applying from an arts high school."

Melling said her cursory talks with Halton public board officials elicited an expected response of why an arts program doesn't exist here.

"Of course, the usual 'lack of funding' was cited as being one reason for the absence of such a program here in Halton, but why can the other boards manage it, especially when Halton is perceived as an affluent community," she wondered.

Peden encouraged her to look into the issue.

"It (arts programming) did become an issue here in the early 1990s but we never pursued it. Part of the reason, I believe, is the whole philosophy of offering all programs in all communities. You know, that whole notion of school community and kids going to their home school."

Trustees and staff are willing to listen to the public on any issue, she said.

Calls to several neighbouring school boards show Peel has three regional arts programs between its public and Catholic boards while the Halton and Hamilton-Wentworth public and Catholic boards have none.

For more information, send an e-mail to Ksenija_melling@yahoo.com.



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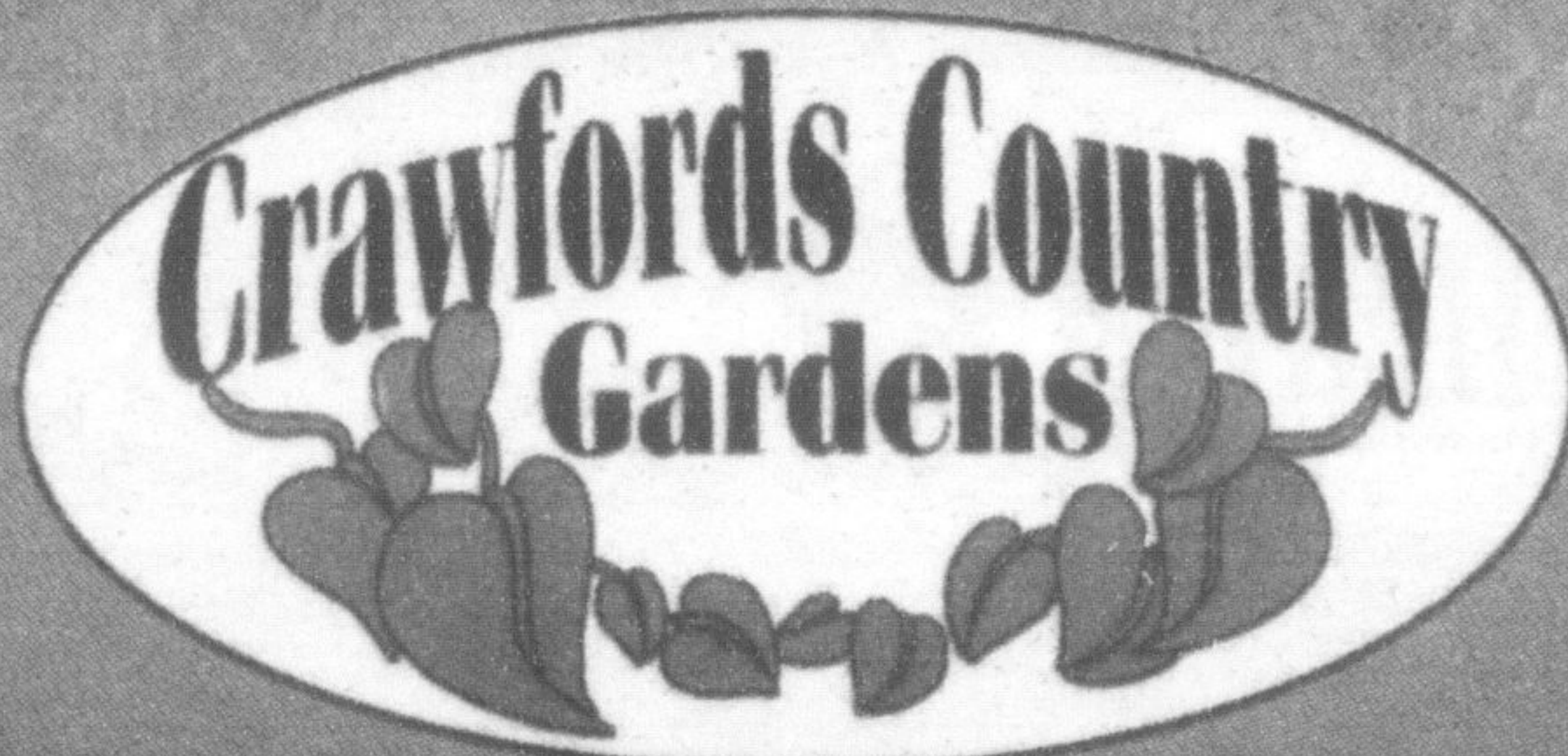
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