

SPORTS

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Campbell springs into retirement

Beloved gymnastics coach ready to step down after 30 years

By Steve LeBlanc
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

After three decades at the helm of the local gymnastics scene, Janet Campbell probably needed at least a little reassurance about her decision to finally pack it in.

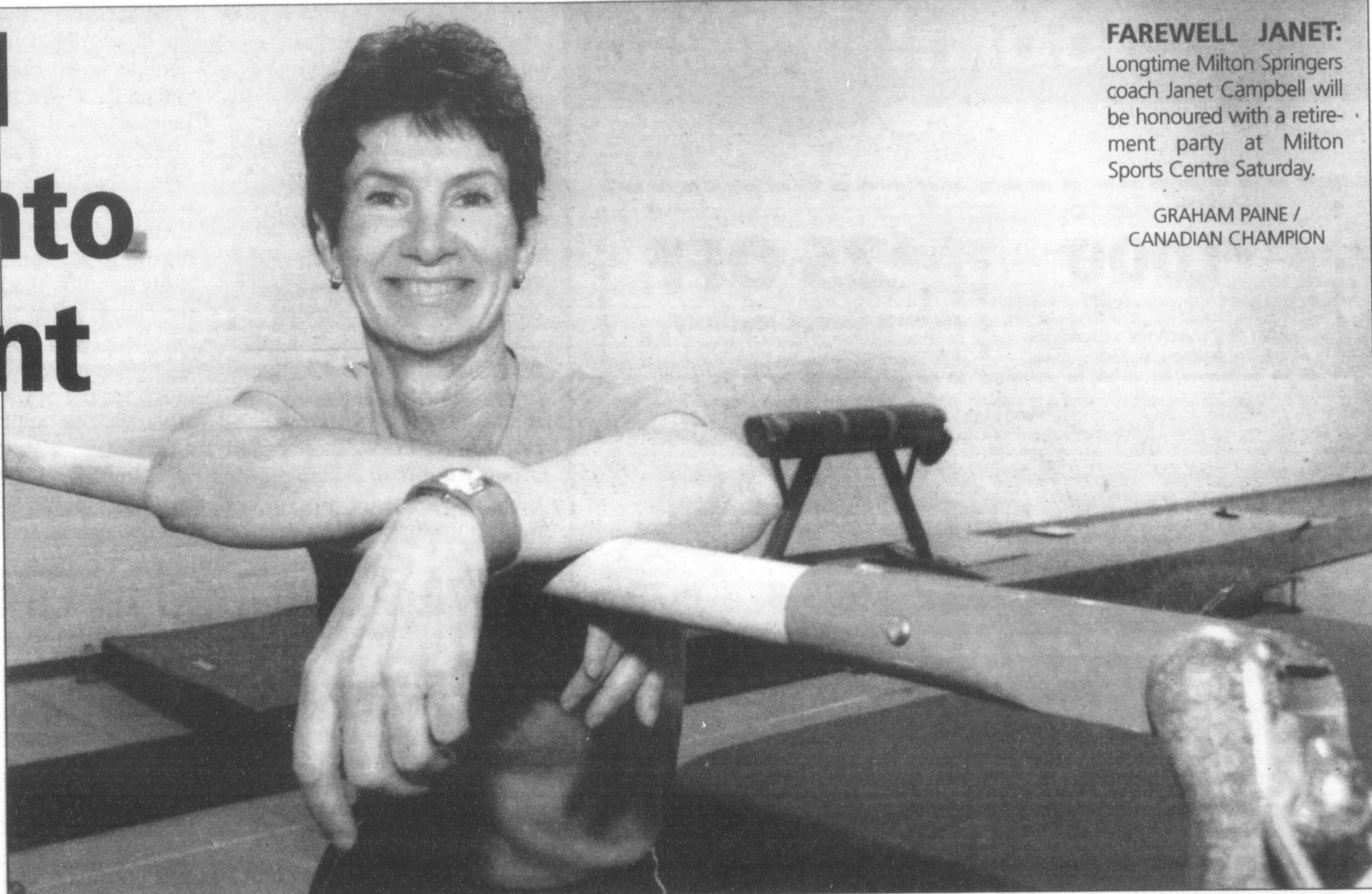
She certainly got a suitable measure of it late last month in Grimsby.

That was the site of her Milton Springers' first-ever all-around provincial championship victory, which came courtesy of Celena Morgan. The 11-year-old's golden performance not only made club history but provided a fitting conclusion to her instructor's lengthy and memorable run.

"The timing couldn't have been more perfect, to have an overall Ontario champ in my last trip to provincials," said 52-year-old Campbell, who'll officially step down as head coach at the end of next month, but with the 2006/07 season essentially over will be honoured with a retirement party this Saturday afternoon at Milton Sports Centre (MSC).

While still basking in the glow of her provincial triumph, Morgan's elation was tempered with more than a little sorrow when contemplating a Campbell-less Springers club next season.

"She's so creative and has taught me so much. I feel like nobody can really replace her," said the young champ.



FAREWELL JANET:

Longtime Milton Springers coach Janet Campbell will be honoured with a retirement party at Milton Sports Centre Saturday.

GRAHAM PAINE /
CANADIAN CHAMPION

That deep-rooted fondness for Campbell is by no means limited to the club's gymnasts.

Remarkd Springers' administrator and assistant coach Linda Massel, "Everyone here will miss Janet. She's been the glue that has held us all together over the years. I will miss her expertise when it comes to anything pertaining to the Springers or gymnastics. Janet coached my daughter when she was a provincial-level gymnast and I can see the impact she had had on Valerie's life when it comes to working hard and staying focused on goals.

"It's going to be a big transition for all of us when she retires."

At the risk of stating the obvious, Campbell leaves the Springers in infinitely better shape than she found it in 1977, when fresh out of university — and with an extensive background in gymnastics — she was enlisted to lead the local club.

"Back then we only had about 50 members and ran out of E.C. Drury High School.

I remember we had to set up and take down the equipment every night," recalled the soon-to-be-retired coach, whose impending departure coincides with her husband's retirement from Canada Post. "It was a makeshift operation, all right."

While the late '70s Springers were nowhere near what they are today, in terms of enrollment or range of programs, Campbell points to one facet of the club that was alive and well even back then.

"We had incredibly committed parent volunteers who helped out every single night."

That dedication, she stressed, was the key to survival throughout some rather lean formative years, when more hours were devoted to keeping the Springers afloat than actually instructing their young participants.

"There were times when I had to hold back my pay-check and we didn't know if we'd be able to keep the doors open," said Campbell, whose commitment to local gymnastics was recognized last spring with a

nomination for the North Halton ATHENA award, which honours professional excellence and valuable community service. "We'd be out everywhere in town, putting up flyers and trying to fill every class."

Having gone through three other locations between its time at Drury and its current 14,000-square-foot facility at MSC, the club is now long-since past its financial hardships — with nearly 1,000 members and a support system to match those sizable ranks.

While her young pupils have had their fair share of success over the years, Campbell said the 2003 move to its spacious MSC digs was by far the most rewarding chapter in the club's history.

"It's been over three years and I still smile when I walk in here. This is one of the prettiest gyms in the province. The Town helped us a lot in getting in here and the parents deserve a lot of credit for hanging in until we did."

• see CAMPBELL on page A18

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