



COMMUNITY

Slimming down to beef up youth centre funds

Weight loss fundraiser to aid The Deck

By Stephanie Hounsell
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

It's no easy feat to shed 80 pounds. But that's just what Oliver Clarke, director of The Deck youth centre, intends to do.

It's slow going, but he knows there's a lot riding on his efforts.

You see, Clarke hopes to raise a whopping \$64,000 by dropping those pesky pounds, with the money going toward staff salaries.

The challenge started recently and now it's one pound at a time.

"Every quarter, I need to lose 20 pounds," Clarke said.

The fundraiser, titled 80/80/800, works like this: Clarke intends to lose 80 pounds between July 1 of this year and June 30, 2009.

He's looking to find 80 people who will sponsor him for \$10 per pound, for a total of \$800 per sponsor.

That would raise a grand total of \$64,000.

Corporate sponsors are being sought, as well as individuals — for whom full, half and quarter sponsorships are available.

All donations will qualify for tax receipts.

Tough go so far

So far, Clarke is down 12 pounds from his original weight of 288; he said it's been particularly difficult throughout vacation season.

He has some help, though. Pur Health and Fitness has donated a membership and a personal trainer, while NRG Fuel Station has contributed supplements.

The tried-and-true techniques of eating healthy and going to the gym will be Clarke's main strategies, he said. And the encouragement of the students at The Deck will no doubt spur him on.

The unique idea for the fundraiser came shortly after a conversation Clarke had with a student in which he encouraged the teen to make healthy choices and quit smoking.

The student turned the tables and said he'd quit smoking when Clarke lost

some weight.

"He was pretty blunt — pretty on-target," Clarke said.

The Deck, located at 200 Main St. E. (back entrance), provides a safe and fun place for teens to hang out through its drop-in program, offering a refuge from home and school pressures.

Caring adult volunteers act as mentors and provide an opportunity for students to explore life-related concerns and spiritual issues.

The past year has been encouraging, Clarke said, with new projects being initiated — such as the babies' room that teen moms or dads can use with experienced parents who can give advice and lend a hand.

Serving hundreds of youths

Throughout this past school year, The Deck has worked with an estimated 500 to 600 different students. About 365 of those came through the drop-in program, while the others were as a result of various other endeavours including coaching a soccer team at E.C. Drury and working in schools, Clarke said.

"We try and know all the students' names so that we can validate them as humans when they feel overlooked by others in their lives," Clarke said.

But The Deck has had a hard time getting funding.

Last year it applied for money from the United Way of Milton, but was rejected, Clarke said.

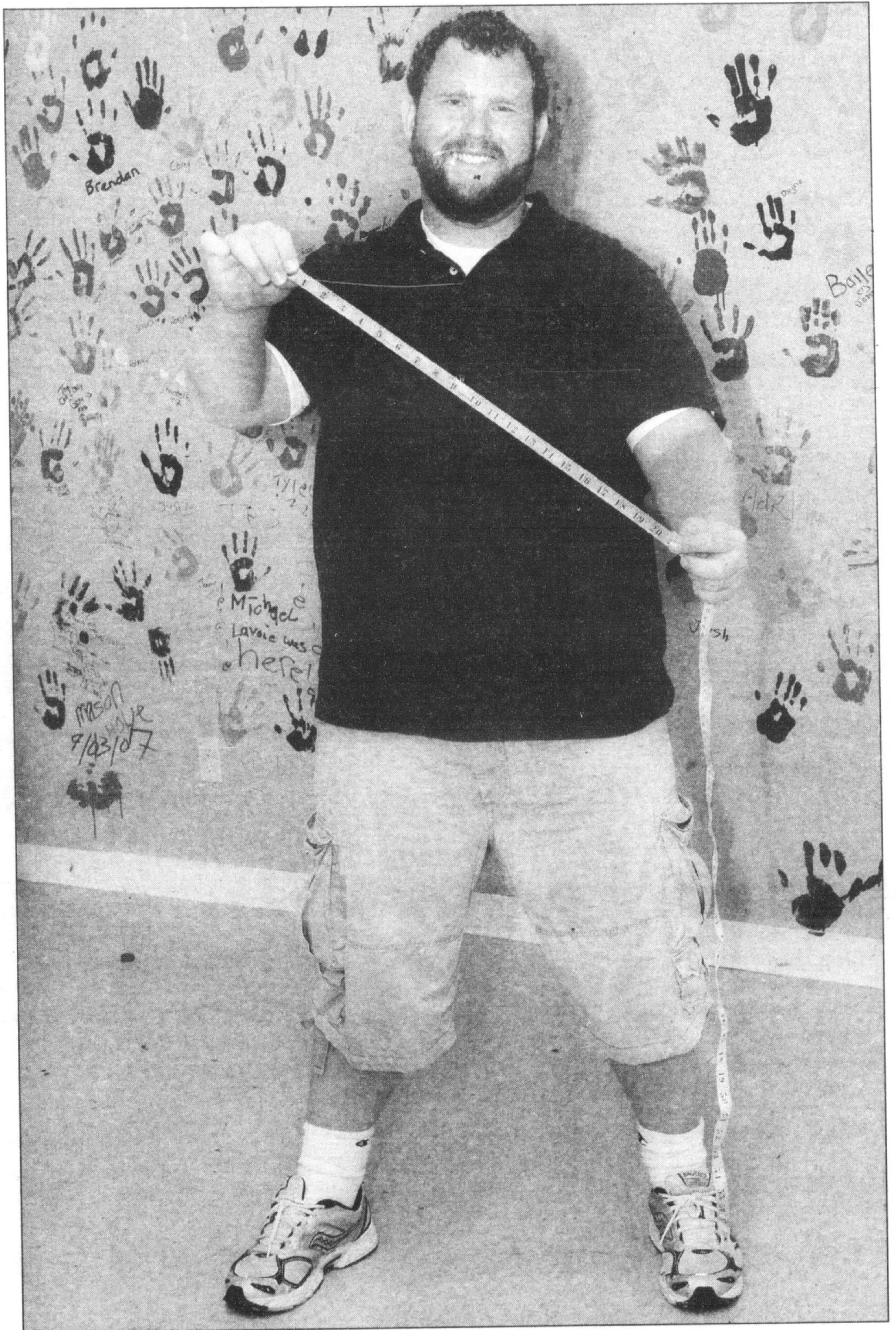
It was the same story with the Town of Milton's Community Fund, Clarke said, to which The Deck applied in 2005. Salaries, he added, are difficult to raise money for.

Currently, the Deck has two part-time staffers and one summer student in addition to Clarke's full-time position.

He's hoping this most recent fundraiser — which will run in addition to The Deck's other fundraisers, like its golf tournament — will go a long way.

For more information or to make a donation, visit www.thedeckmilton.com or call (905) 876-0368.

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MEASURING HIS PROGRESS: Oliver Clarke uses a tape measure to track his ongoing weight loss.



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