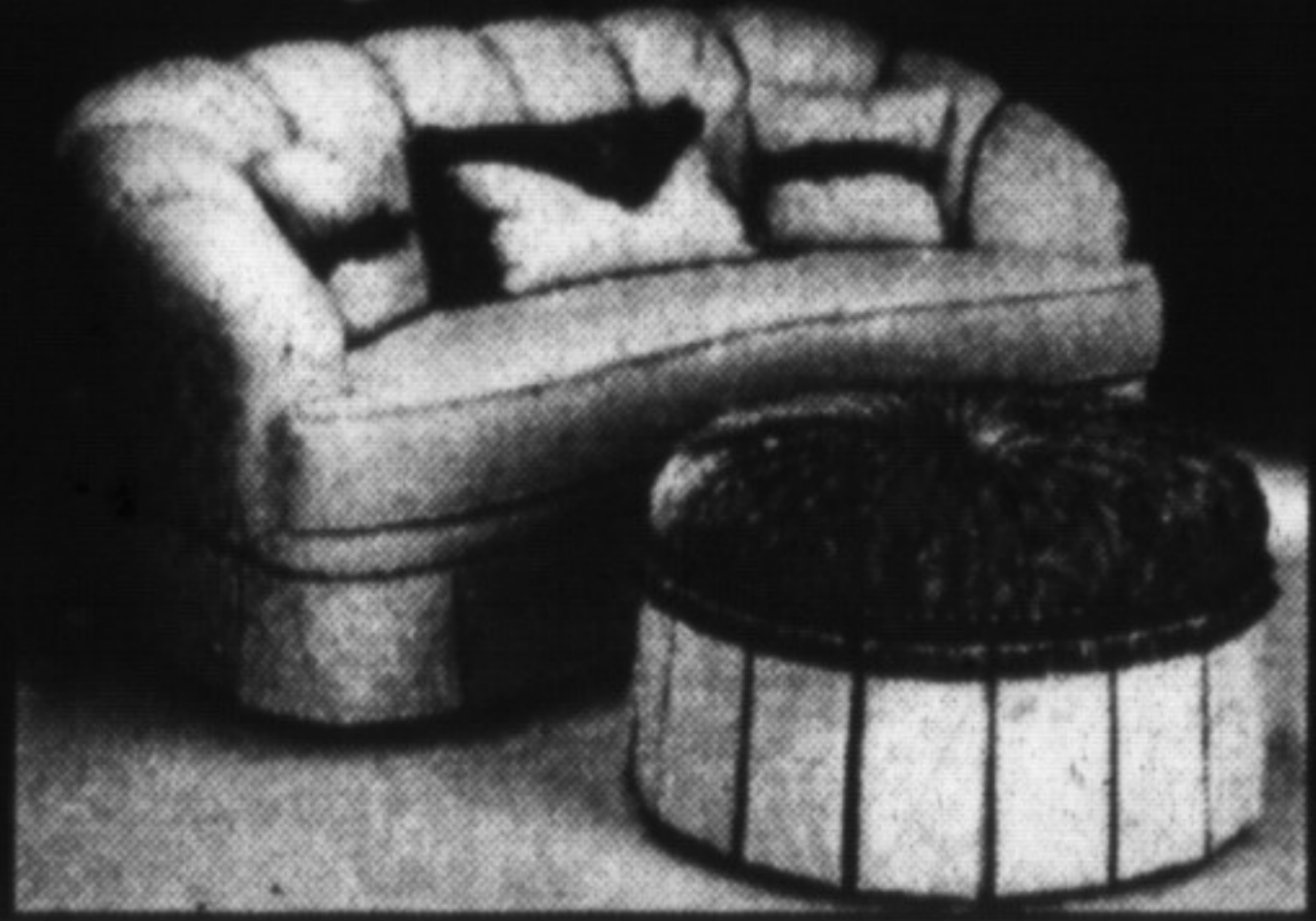


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Aboriginal youth learning horticulture



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Instructor Ken Parker (left) shows Aboriginal students Todd Appleby and Cathy Morningstar the features of the yellow cedar tree. The students are among 20 enrolled in the Aboriginal horticulture program at Landscape Ontario.

By STEVE LeBLANC
Special to the Champion

Young Aboriginals from across Ontario are getting first-hand training in the field of horticulture and landscaping thanks to a joint effort by Landscape Ontario and the Ontario Horticultural Human Resources Council.

The two agencies have joined forces to renew their 12-week training program, which this year has been designed exclusively for Aboriginal youth.

The second-year course is part of Landscape Ontario's on-going initiative to "create a flow of people into the horticulture and landscape industry," according to Terry Murphy, Landscape Ontario's director of education.

"The objective is to introduce the students to the field of horticulture so they have a better feel for it and can make a decision on whether or not they wish to pursue it as a career," he said.

The course, held at Landscape Ontario on Fifth Line, has an enrollment of 20 students from such areas as Toronto, Fort Erie, Belleville and Six Nations near Brantford. "We have a nice mix of students from both the city and various reservations," Mr. Murphy said.

Now in its fifth week, the program offers training in a variety of different areas — everything from tree planting to mixing cement to detailed landscape design. A total of eight experts have been brought in from each area touched on.

Among them is Milton's John King, a supervisor with a local construction design company, who has taught for 12 years at Humber College.

"Last year we had about 50 students so this year's smaller group makes for a better education for the students. With most of the foundation work done last year, the students this year are also getting a better education earlier on."

Also on hand is Six Nations nursery owner Ken Parker, who has been brought in as the course's coordinator and full-time instructor. He said this project is unique for native students.

"I haven't heard of another project geared specifically to native students. It offers an introduction into all aspects of horticulture and gives them the hands-on experience that's so important," Mr. Parker stressed.

"What I like about the course is that the students are learning from the experts. It's like a gathering of the all-stars in the industry."

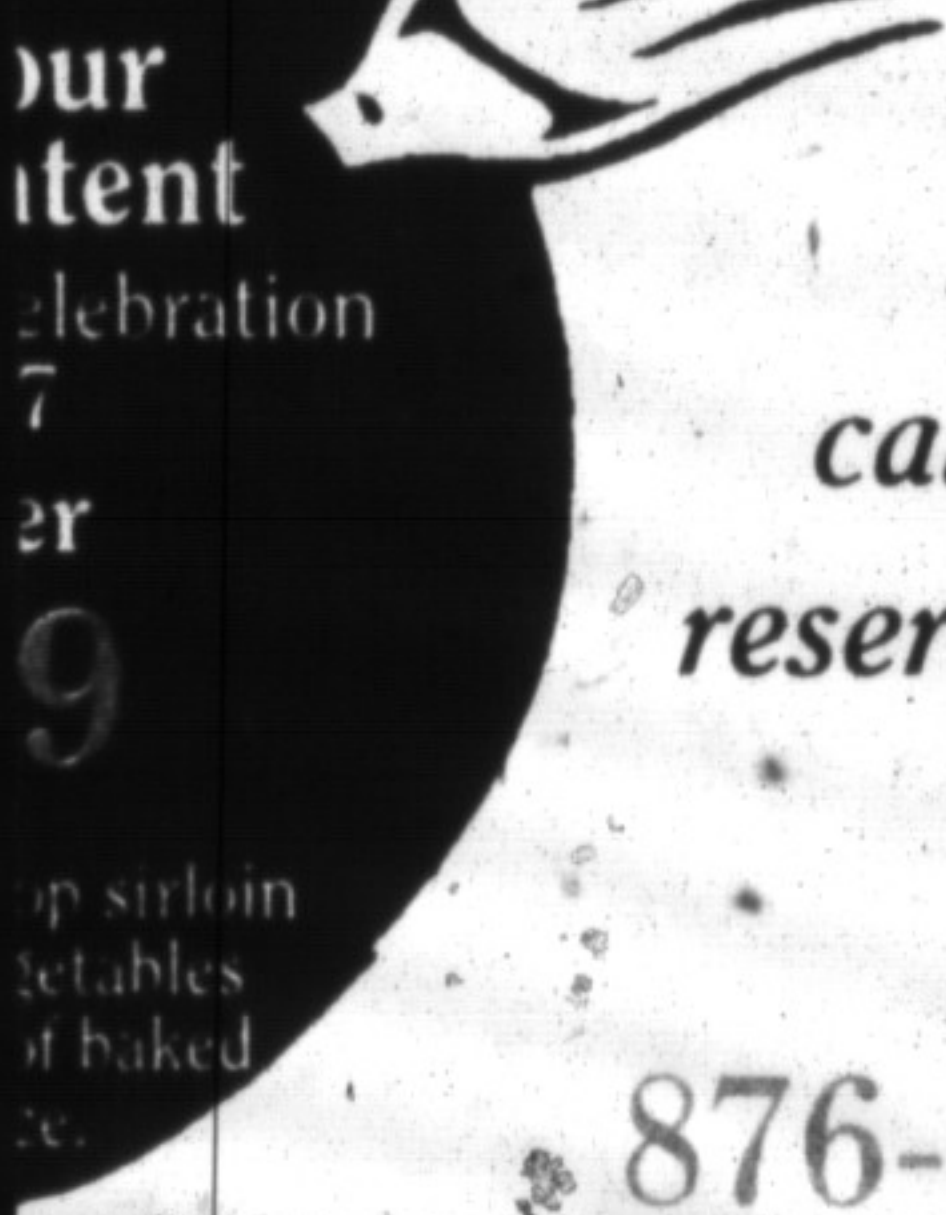
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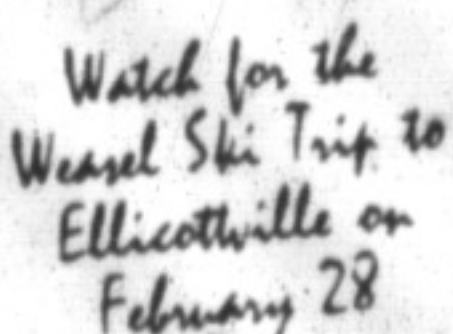
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