

# Landscape work is no walk in the park

By **Melanie Hennessey**  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Many Milton parents will likely recognize Chris Tonner's face. As they're pushing their children on the swings and watching them frolic through the splash pad on a hot day at Milton Community Park, the seasoned Town employee is diligently working on the nearby landscape, making sure the park remains in tip-top condition all summer long.

And while it has been a particularly sweltering few weeks, you won't hear Tonner griping about the heat as he tends to the expansive — and still growing — park.

"When you work outside all winter and you're cold all winter, you don't complain when it finally gets hot," he said, referring to his alternate position with the Town as a snowplow operator. "I think this is the wrong profession to be in if you don't like being outside."

The long-time Miltonian and his crew are in charge of maintaining all aspects of the Community Park, from the fields to the bathrooms — a job so big that it's his full-time assignment through the summer.

While most grass around town is brown and dormant, it's green and growing on the park's sports fields thanks to an irrigation system with 240 sprinkler heads.

Lawn cutting keeps Tonner and his crew busy — a service that may seem almost invisible as many Community Park-goers are there at night, long after the day shift and hard work is over.

"When groups come to use the fields at night, they don't care how hot it's

been that day — they just care if their field is ready," he said. "We have to keep up the same pace and get the job done regardless of what the weather is like."

But Tonner doesn't let that bother him as he takes pride in maintaining the well-used park alongside his crew of three summer staff.

"I've got a great group of guys; we work well as a team," he said. "I can also send any one of them to do a job on their own and I know it's going to get done."

Tonner recalls a time when his work felt particularly rewarding. It was after the tornado ripped through the heart of Milton in 2009, leaving a path of destruction in its wake. The Town had all hands on deck to help residents deal with the aftermath, calling in staff to work overtime and get the job done.

"I remember coming down Childs Drive and leaves and debris were all over the road. Some trees were snapped off at the canopy, and others at the ground. We were picking up truckloads of branches and dumping them at the fairgrounds," he said. "I worked a lot of overtime. We told people to bring it (branches and brush) out of their backyards and we would clean it up. A lot of people were upset because these are trees that were so old and established, and now they're just gone. Knowing that we were helping them was rewarding."

Tonner also helped make Milton shine during the Pan Am Games last year.

"We tried to make the town look at good as we could," he said. "We would cut the grass as often as pos-



sible to keep everything under control. Leading up to the Pan Am it was raining, so we had to make hay when the sun shines."

Back at the Community Park, Tonner said he enjoys serving as the frontline staff dealing with local residents during the day — a perk of the job for a social person like himself.

"I really like working with people," he said. "And the great thing about Milton is, even though the population has really grown, it doesn't feel like it has. You can still walk down Main Street and say hi to someone you know. It's the best of town and country, like the mayor says."

So how do Tonner and his team beat the heat on those relentlessly hot summer days?

"Since there's a splash pad at the park, we just go and dunk our heads underneath the water," he said with a laugh. "We also drink lots of water and can work modified hours if we need to, like 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. instead of 7 to 3, so we're on the job when it's not as hot and still getting eight hours worth of work."

Tonner said he also sometimes saves irrigation system checks to particularly hot moments when he wouldn't mind a mist of water to cool him down.

Hats, sunglasses and sunscreen are



Town of Milton outdoor crew member Chris Tonner works to keep Milton Community Park in tip-top shape. *Melanie Hennessey / Canadian Champion*

also a must, along with special work pants the Town has provided that feature breathable mesh from the knee down.

As he recently prepared to head off for some vacation time, Tonner recalled there's something he has to do on the home front before he can relax.

"I need to cut my (own) grass," he said, noting it's a task he doesn't grow tired of, even after tending to sports fields all day at the park. "I'm really particular about my lawn."

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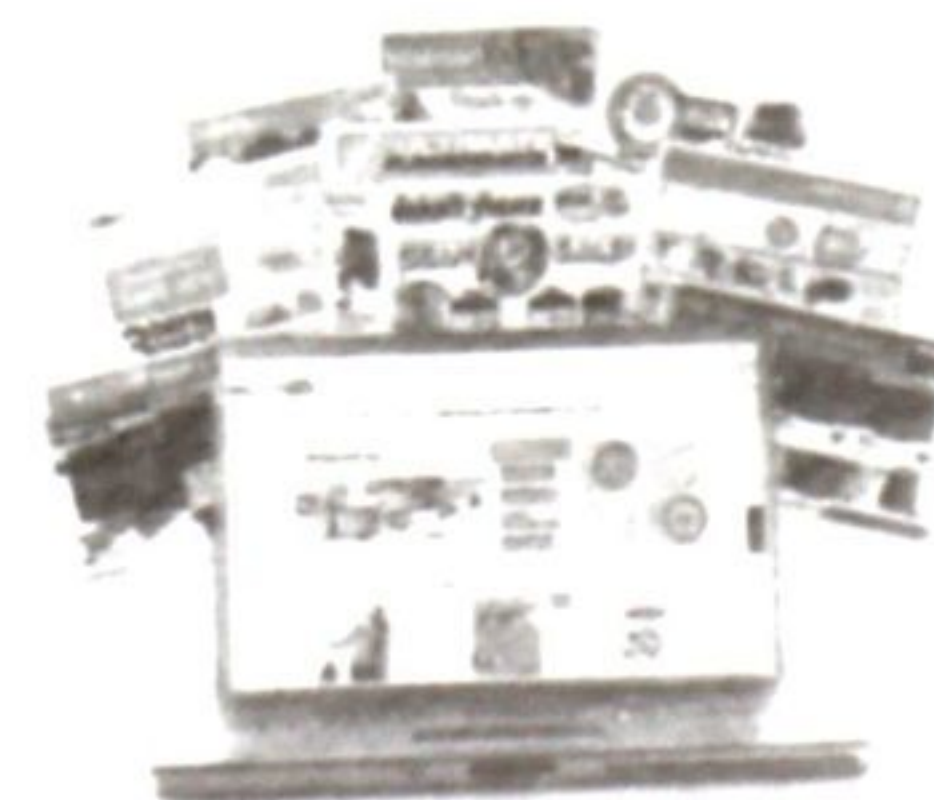
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