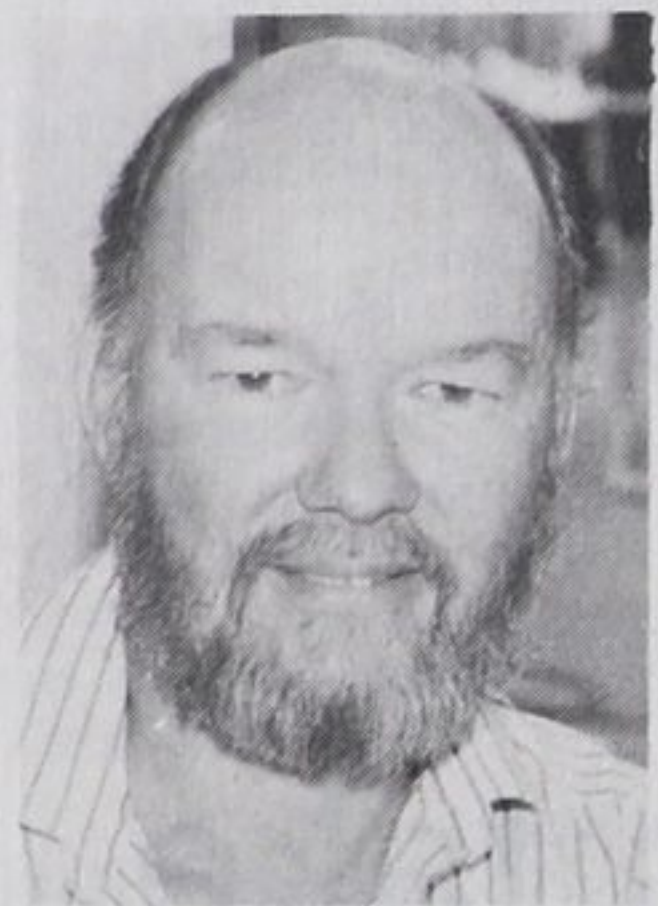


Dedication trademark of winners

by David Krayden

"I never thought I'd ever win an award like this," Ross Kirkby said. The 46-year-old Midland resident had just been informed that he was the recipient of a Heart of Gold certificate and pin in a contest sponsored jointly by Air



Kirkby

Canada and this newspaper.

The honor is given to a citizen in the community who has demonstrated consistent community spirit and who rarely refuses to offer his time and energy for projects.

Meanwhile, Beverley Juneau of Victoria Harbour was also named as a Heart of Gold recipient. She could not be contacted by deadline.

Kirkby was nominated by Ann Wilson, who described the winner as "the sort of guy who will do anything for you but rarely gets credit for doing so." She said Kirkby is always initiating projects but then prefers to let someone else manage them once they're running smoothly.

"Running smoothly" might be a fair characterization of Kirkby's 13-year career at Midland Secondary School, where he teaches the basic-level students.

"That's what they're calling it now," says Kirkby. "At other times it was special education or occupational education."

Outside of class hours, the teacher instructs a chess club of approximately 25 members. The organization began six years ago and Kirkby has tried to introduce as many basic-level students as possible. He notes that "various studies have shown that chess improves a student's thinking ability."

But he cannot say definitely that the playing of chess has actually improved anyone's academic standing.

That's extremely hard to determine," he says. "But I have noticed a correlation between chess and their ability to associate with other people; between chess and their sense of fair play."

After all, as Kirkby points out, "Education is not just academic standing."

Though Kirkby's students may improve during their time at high school, he doesn't know whether that is due to playing chess or the effects of his teaching. "Basic-level students improve a lot in the high school system anyway."

Kirkby is readily acknowledged to have a definite gift for teaching students which previous eras may have shown less concern for. When asked what that special something is, Kirkby's answer is immediate: "Understanding. I've always been understanding. I'm as impatient as the next guy."

He applies that concern in the classroom and ensures that his students are "treated with respect and in a positive manner."

Being positive has guided Kirkby throughout his career.

He was born and raised in North York. He entered Toronto Teacher's College and subsequent to his graduation, taught in the elementary school system for five years.

Along the way he earned his Special Education degree from York University. He had to take courses at night while working during the day to do so. "It's not the easiest way to do it," Kirkby says. "You miss some of the university atmosphere that way."

In 1976, he moved to Midland where he began teaching at MSS. Six years ago the chess club was born.

Although Kirkby says the game is not played with the same enthusiasm as it is in Europe, there is nonetheless a growing interest amongst all ages. Along with encouraging the sport at the school, the teacher has formed an adult chess society in

Midland as well as the Huronia Chess Club, whose management he has handed over to Dave Williams, another local chess enthusiast.

The MSS chess club has placed first at the Ontario Secondary School Championships in the B division for the past two years. The competition is divided into four teams: A, B, C and D, with levels of expertise being expressed in descen-

ding order. It is Kirkby's hope that someday MSS will produce a winning A team, something which Alliston's Banting High School has consistently been able to do.

The competitions across the county have meant significant travelling for Kirkby. He is always willing to transport his students too. "Some of them have no other way of getting there or back," says

the teacher. "I certainly don't mind taking them." Though chess dominates Kirkby's life along with his job ("I love it," he says) he

has other interests. He enjoys photography, reading magazines and newspapers, fishing and canoeing, automobile rac-

ing and has recently decided to build his own house. "I rarely watch TV," he notes, "except if its one of the science shows."

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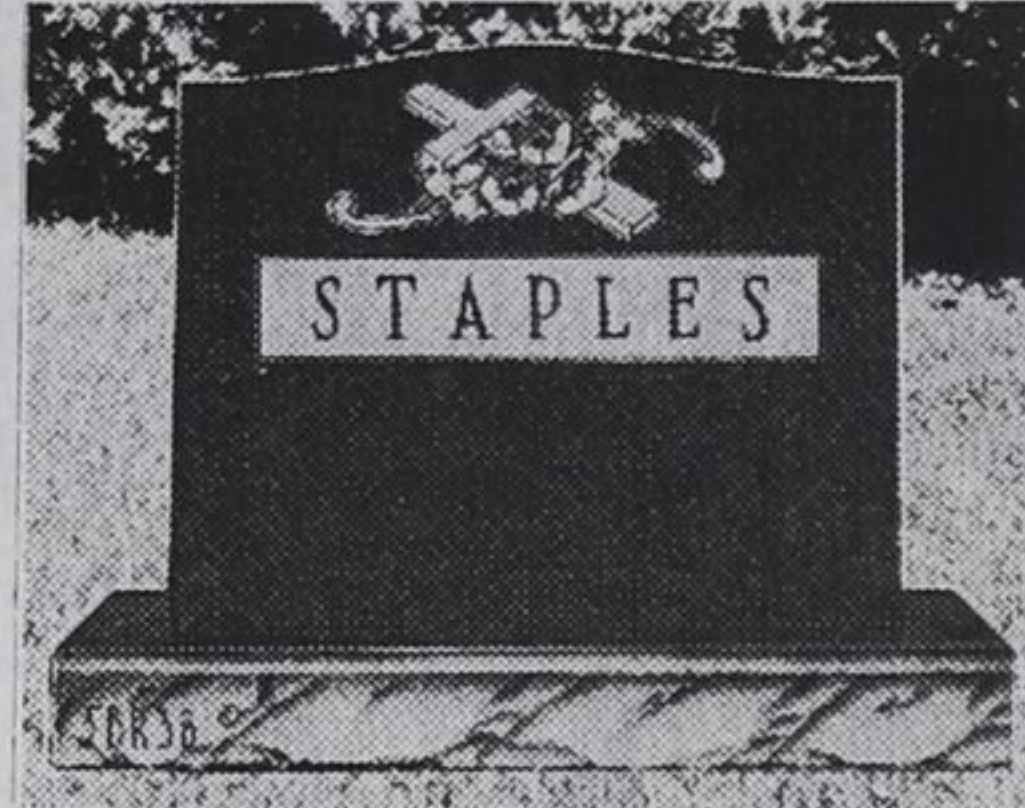
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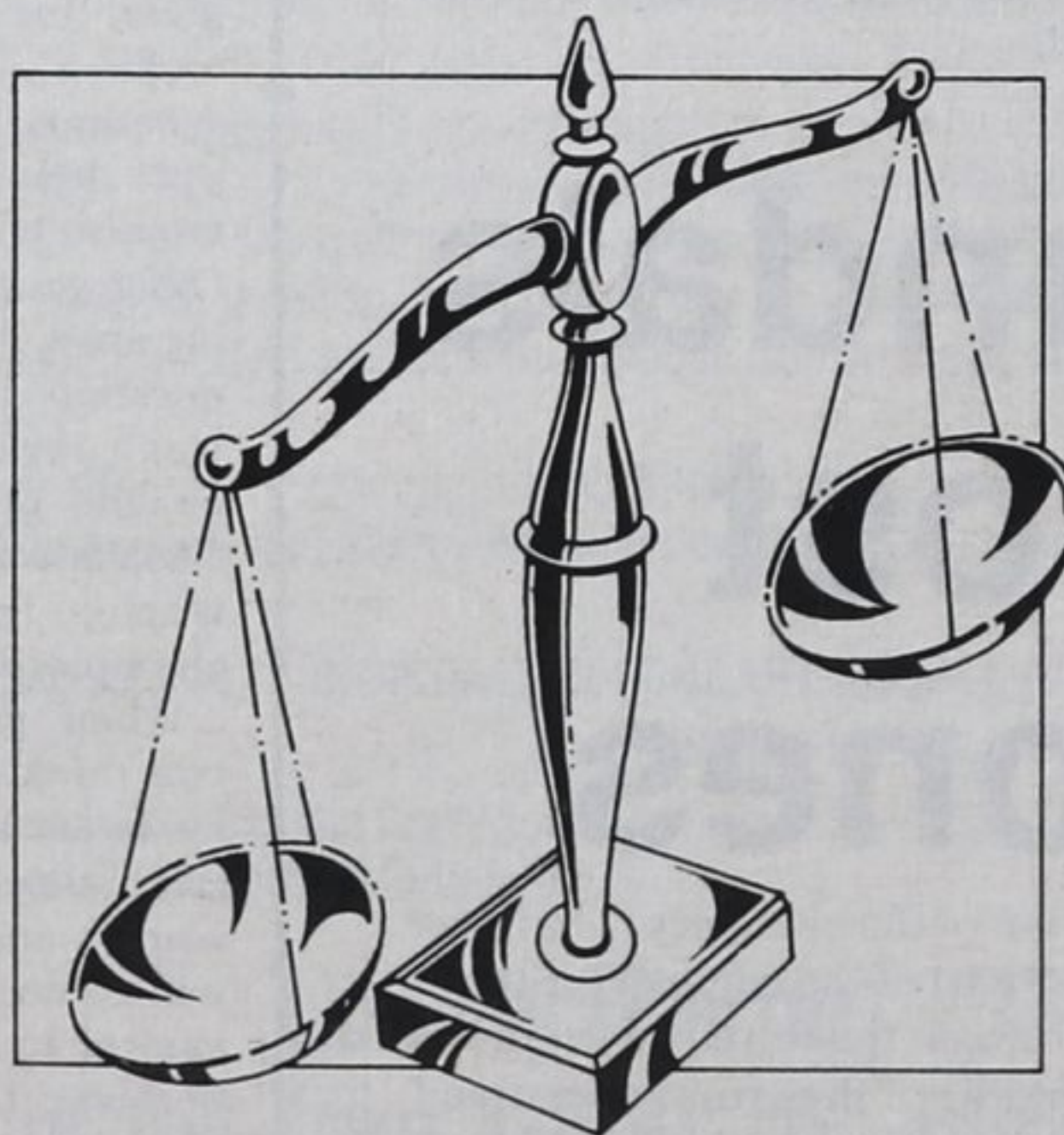
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