

Tradition lives on at half-century old shop

BY DENISE McDONALD
WHITCHURCH — Maintaining a tradition for quality workmanship and excellence that started in 1929, has now become Carmen Griscti's main priority for Baker's Harness Shop, over 50 years later.

"This shop was originally founded by Isaac Baker during the Depression years in what is now called Concorde," says Mr. Griscti. "He had set such a high standard for his work over the years; that when I took over in 1980, I felt it was my duty to match this excellence."

According to Mr. Griscti, he originally became involved in the harness and leather industry at Pioneer Village, where he basically became self taught. He later moved to New Brunswick, returning to apprentice in the saddlery industry during the winter months.

"It wasn't until I joined up with Isaac I realized just how little I knew," he says. "However, his methods of teaching were very effective. After spending all day doing very involved work on a

draft horse harness, he would point out what I'd done wrong. And it was always enough to do it all over again. The next time I was very careful how I did it."

Taking over in 1980, Mr. Griscti set about securing a new location for Baker's Harness Shop.

"Do you know how hard it is to find a place that is accessible to people, yet zoned for a commercial enterprise," he asks, referring to the shop's present location on Woodbine Avenue, between 18th and 19th Avenues. "It's a rare find. However, Council was really nice about it; even if I did feel like a nobody standing beside guys with big major plans."

Now, over 50 years later, Mr. Griscti has expanded the harness shop to include a tack store as well, offering a wide variety of products to the equestrian community.

"I offer all my products at a fair price according to what I think they're worth," he says. "I'm certainly not getting rich. People are always asking me why I don't have sales. But why should I? My

prices aren't high in the first place."

Mr. Griscti also claims to "never display articles so they catch people's eyes," and in fact, often discourages customers from buying things they don't need.

"Mr. Baker often only charged customers 25 cents for repairing halters," he explains. "Even seven years ago that wasn't a lot of money."

Although he does admit Mr. Baker's leather work was well known throughout North America, Mr. Griscti claims it wasn't the most cosmetically pleasing.

"When he made a halter it had to last for years and years and often withstood the test of time," he says. "However, I found people weren't buying that type of product and have since tried to compromise as much as possible."

Baker's Harness Shop's most recent accomplishment, according to Mr. Griscti, was to design saddles for the camels at the Metropolitan Zoo.

"We'll custom manufacture anything to the customer's specifications," he adds.



Carmen Griscti works his piercin, a device that sews leather, in his shop at Baker's Harness on Woodbine Ave. south of Stouffville Rd. — Denise McDonald

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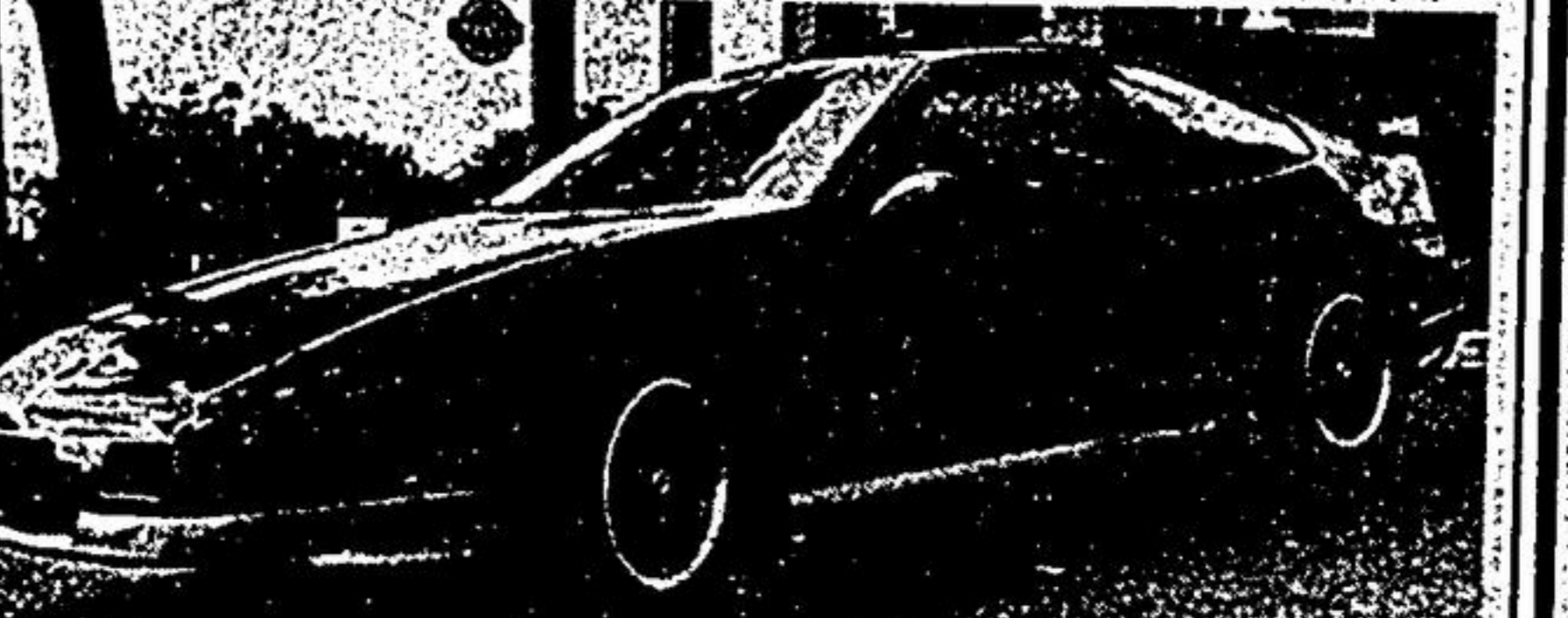
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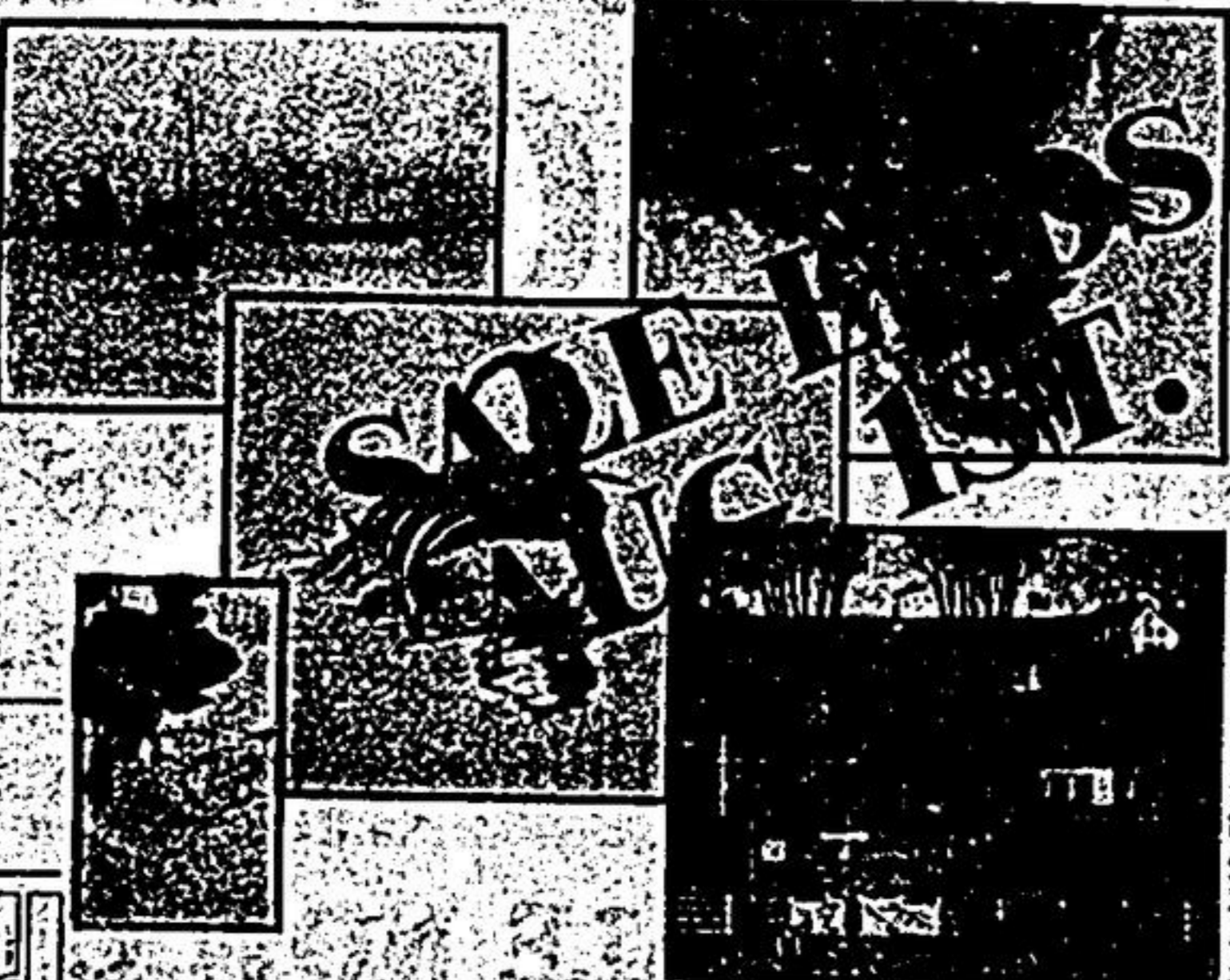
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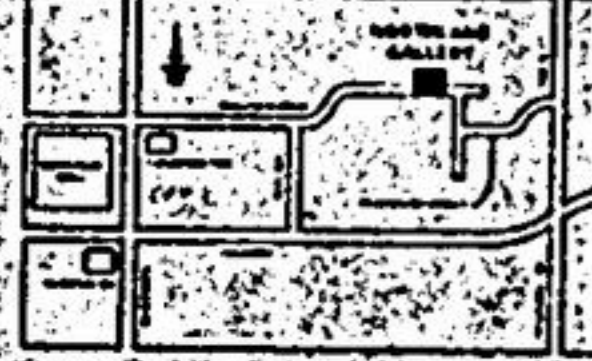
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