

Stouffville woman enjoys cleaning up

By BRUCE STAPLEY
For Lana Grainger-Black, cleaning up after others has become a way of life.

The Stouffville resident who runs a one-woman house cleaning operation called The Sparkles Company, credits her 10-year business with giving her both independence and much needed physical activity.

"I could never be confined to a 9 to 5 office job," she insists. "I really feel I'm suited to this type of work. It gives me physical activity and freedom."

Lana has always been a strong proponent of physical fitness. She was a training manager for a fitness institute in the early 70s, and went on to work for the Jack Lalanne organization after that.

Ski instructor

She took up skiing at the age of 17, and has reached a level of proficiency that saw her become a member of the Dagmar Ski School this winter.

Raised in Parry Sound, where she rode the same school bus as hockey great Bobby Orr, Lana moved to Toronto and attended Northern Secondary School, where she was a cheerleader.

She moved to Ringwood in 1977, and one year later was asked to help an acquaintance with her house cleaning, one morning a week.

"It just mushroomed from there," she claims. "And I still have that first customer today."

While she says she has many of the same customers who were with her in the early years, her first is very special.

"I've seen 10 Christmas trees in their home," she recalls. "They are a lovely family. I've watched the kids grow from teenagers into adults. And they have always made me feel like part of the family."

Lana says she never had to place an ad in the paper to get customers for her first seven years in business.

No ads placed

"I feel a sense of gratitude to the town for that," she claims. "Most customers have become friends. I can go and visit them, and I have actually shared in the lives, and in one case, the death, of them."

Her clients have included millionaires and single parents, professional hockey players and truck drivers. She says she has been inspired by the decorating ideas in some houses, and has learned different approaches to child raising in others.

And while some loath the thought of cleaning six or seven toilets as part of their day's work, Lana's developed a philosophical attitude to her profession.

"You can't have a negative personality and do this type of work," she insists. "It's a service people really need."

'Positive job'

She admits there are times she asks herself if she should go out and get a 'real' job.

"But then I think of the benefits and advantages," she said. "To me it's a positive job. You walk into the house, and it's a mess. But when you leave, you know how much it's going to mean to the customer to come home to a freshly cleaned house."

Lana has always tried to tune in to her customers, to learn their preferences so she can leave them little 'surprises' every now and again. And she tries to remember the pets. "I always take treats for the dogs — the bone from last night's dinner or whatever."

It's a source of great satisfaction to her how her customers come to trust her with their valuables, and even, in some cases,

their secrets involving their lifestyles.

"I have keys to most of my customers' houses," she claims. "I remember one time a customer was robbed. I never even heard from the police, so great was their trust."

Her working relationship with her customers is such she can switch days if necessary.

"It definitely makes for a no ulcer situation when you get that kind of co-operation," she says.

Well-trusted

She has come to appreciate the freedom aspect of the business because of how it's allowed her to always be there for her 12-year-old daughter, Julie.

"Parenting is, in my opinion, the most important job of a mother," she says with conviction. "The cleaning business has allowed me to put her first."

Lana has taken on extra women with an eye to expanding the business in the past, but found it took a specific type of person to do the work involved.

"Some women feel it's beneath them to clean someone else's house. They don't want to be looked upon as a cleaning lady."

Planned on expanding

According to the attractive red-head with the indefatigable nature, her daily workload consists of two, and on occasion, three houses, which, when accompanied with her frantic ski schedule, sees her get all the physical activity she can handle in the winter months.

She concludes by expressing her sincere gratitude to the town that has allowed her to work at a job that gives her the flexibility to pursue all her other interests.

"Stouffville's been very good to me. It's provided me with my livelihood."



Lana Grainger-Black likes keeping things clean — even her car windows. She's the lone employee of The Sparkles Company, a house cleaning service.

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Mr. Fix-It's been at it since he was a toddler

By BRUCE STAPLEY
When he was three years old, he fixed his first bicycle. Shortly after, he took his mother's sewing machine apart to see what made it tick.

And now, at the age of 26, he spends most of his spare time in other people's houses, installing fireplace doors, repairing taps, hooking up ice makers, or doing anything else his customers don't have the time or the know how to attempt themselves.

For Stouffville's Wayne Holt, it's a way of saving up for that first starter house and an opportunity to apply his jack-of-all-trade 'handy man' skills he has been developing since childhood.

By day an employee at Almira Furniture in Unionville, in charge of final assembly and shipping, Wayne heads out most evenings and weekends to homes in the Stouffville-Markham-Uxbridge area.

He looks after householders' needs ranging from the installation of a light bulb, through building and installing shelving units, and just about everything in between.

"The main reason I'm in business is that there are people out there who don't know which end of a screwdriver to hold, or who are just too busy to do their own work," says the young man who takes so much pride in his ability to fix, adapt, adjust or install, things that go into the contemporary house.

"I guess the idea for turning it into a business came when I was working at Card's Hardware" he says. "They asked me a few times if I would be interested in installing appliances and equipment bought by their customers, and in providing a handy man service to some of their customers who were seniors."

"I always knew I wanted to have my own business", he maintains. "And I've always taken an interest in how things work."

Wayne's years at Stouffville District Secondary School saw him take most of the technical courses such as electronics, auto shop, machine shop, and wood working.

In fact it was his willingness to lend his expertise to the school for a stage production that landed him his first job.

"I was doing the lighting for a fashion show at the school back in 1980," he recalls. "The owner of Bruce County Pine came up to me and asked me if I could drive a truck. I ended up as store manager on a full-time basis after working there part-time doing deliveries until I finished school."

While Wayne's ever increasing knowledge of the hand crafted furniture business has made him a valued employee to the companies he has worked for in that field, he has his sights set on someday pursuing his handy man interests on a full time basis.

"Right now, I'm finding that it is getting a little difficult to keep up with the work on a part-time basis. I can see the day coming when I'll start doing it full time, expanding my services, and possibly even hiring some other people."

Going under the name of 'The Main' (as in Maintenance Man), Wayne claims there is no home related job he will not consider. "I'll take on anything within reason" he says. "I enjoy a challenge."

However, he says he finds himself doing some jobs with more regularity than others. "I do a lot of central vacuum installations, garage door openers and appliance related hook ups."

Is there anything he won't tackle? "I won't do painting or wall papering" he claims. "I know my limitations."

Married to his wife Lisa for a little over two years, Wayne admits that there is a price to pay for his hours spent tending to the home related needs of his custom-

ers. "It cuts into your social life," he admits. "And you can find yourself pretty tired some nights."

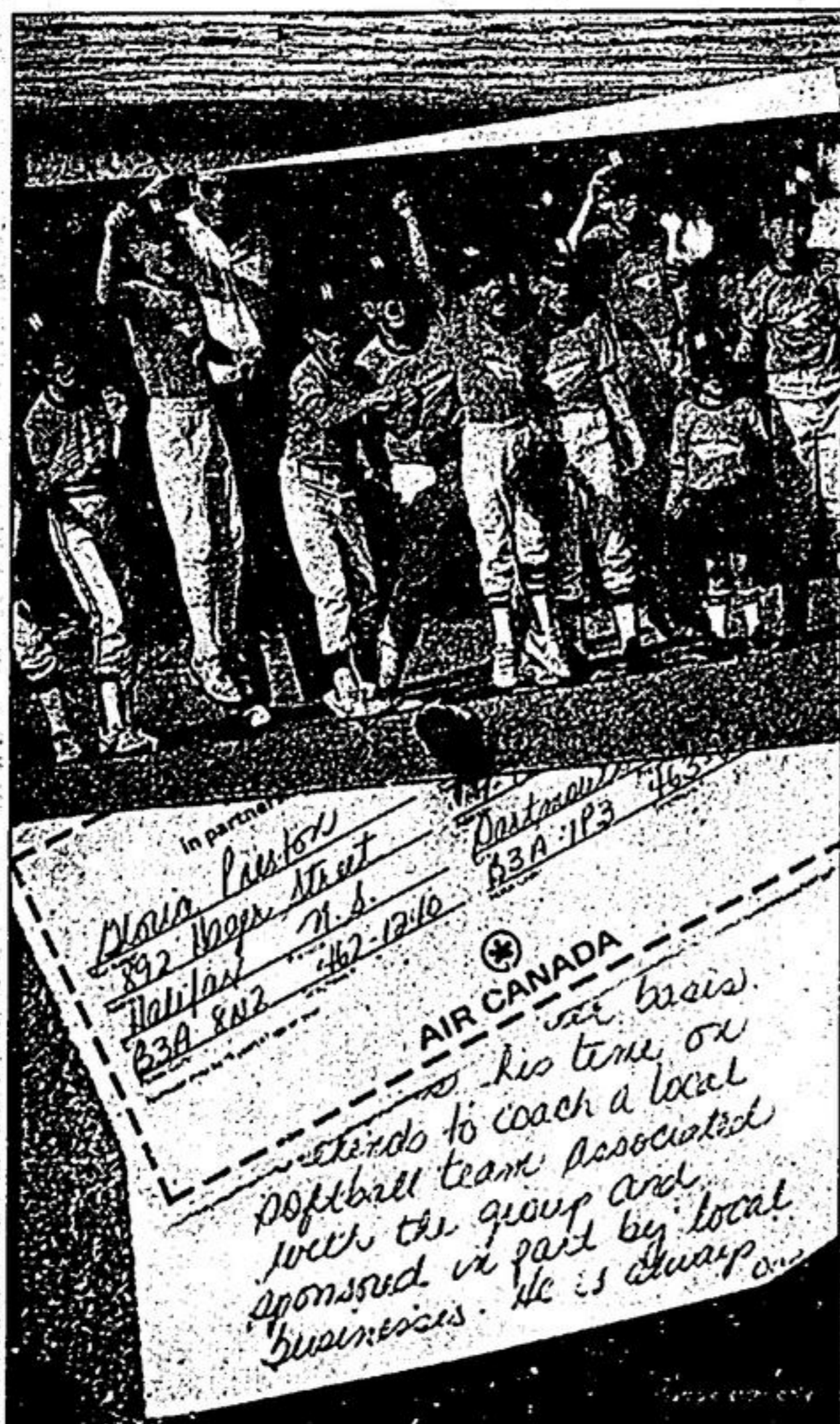
One job, a central vac installation, found him working until 2 a.m. "The people hadn't moved in yet!" he adds. He has worked as many as 30 hours a week on his 'second job', but feels that it's the price he must pay if he wants to someday buy a house.

The business survives entirely by word of mouth, and referrals. He recently purchased a mini-van for the purpose of hauling around his tools, equipment and stock.

When asked to recall the most unusual requests he has had, he mentions both the mini-irrigation system he was called upon to install, and the time he was asked to convert a German-made wall unit for use in Canada with Canadian hydro hookups.

He's hopeful that the housing boom in Stouffville and surrounding areas continues. "There's always something that needs doing in a new house", says Wayne.

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