



Shadow Lake counsellor Mark Koofing, 20, dumps recreational camping program for the fellow staff member Alicia Hogan. During the developmentally handicapped summer months, Shadow Lake Centre provides a

Shadow Lake a special camp for special kids

KATE GILDERDALE
Correspondent

Although it's a mere 10 minutes by car from downtown Stouffville, the Shadow Lake outdoor recreation centre may be one of the best-kept secrets in the area. Located near Musselman's Lake, just across the road from Cedar Beach, this well-equipped facility features its own beautiful lake, plenty of woodland and a developed waterfront area. It was also the site chosen as the starting point for the 1989 Strawberry Festival's triathlon competition.

During the summer months, Shadow Lake Centre provides a recreational camping program for the developmentally handicapped through the Metropolitan Toronto Association for Community Living. For the rest of the year, it's available for use by organizations such as schools, scouting and guiding groups, and other community associations.

Although it's on Stouffville's doorstep, says Director Gary Ouellette, the majority of his bookings come from groups outside the area; one of his aims is to encourage more local organizations to take advantage of the centre.

"There's a misconception that this is for the developmentally handicapped only," he says. "While it's our primary mandate to provide recreational programs for them, the centre is open to a wide range of community groups throughout the year, apart from the summer months."

For many years, Shadow Lake was owned by the Timothy Eaton Co., says Ouellette. "It was operated as a summer camp for the families of employees in the '30s, '40s and '50s. After the company sold it, sometime around the late '50s, it was privately owned for about five or six years. In 1965, what was then the Metro Toronto Association for the Mentally Retarded, purchased it."

Initially it was used solely as a summer camp. "About eight years ago our board of directors, through the association, made a commitment to invest in the facility and operate it on a year-round basis."

As well as the summer camp, which runs from June 18 to Sept. 1, "we offer programs for the developmentally handicapped at Christmas-time during the school break."

"We also have several group homes that call up throughout the winter for weekends of cross-country skiing and skating," he adds. Age is no barrier for the summer program. "This year, my youngest is seven and my oldest will be 88."

Some families nowadays prefer to send their youngsters to regular camp, he acknowledges. "There's a movement afoot that's more towards integration, rather than segregated camps such as this, but I still think we provide a much-needed service to people who are looking for this type of summer program."

There is a full-time staff of three at Shadow Lake with between 45 and 50 employed during the summer, including service staff and counsellors. There are no specific qualifications for campers, Ouellette stressed. "I believe in an open-door policy. Everyone should have the opportunity to send their son or daughter to camp; it's a form of parent relief."

For individuals requiring special attention, there's a one-to-one ratio of staff to campers; the general ratio is one-to-three. "There are about 30 counsellors who work specifically with our campers, as well as

specialty staff including craft instructors, life guards, sports instructors and health care personnel," he notes.

The centre has an infirmary with three beds, a recreation hall with a basketball court and playroom area and a modern dining hall, as well as 300 acres of land.

"We offer every conceivable sport, from baseball and golf to archery," he says. "We have outdoor camping programs and

swimming, boating and canoeing on the lake." Creative arts, crafts, music and drama are also featured.

In the off-season, the centre is used for a variety of programs. "We deal with just about every high school in the city and North York," he explains. "They use the centre for activities like canoe instruction and orienteering. The Scarborough Board of Education offers leadership training programs to students."

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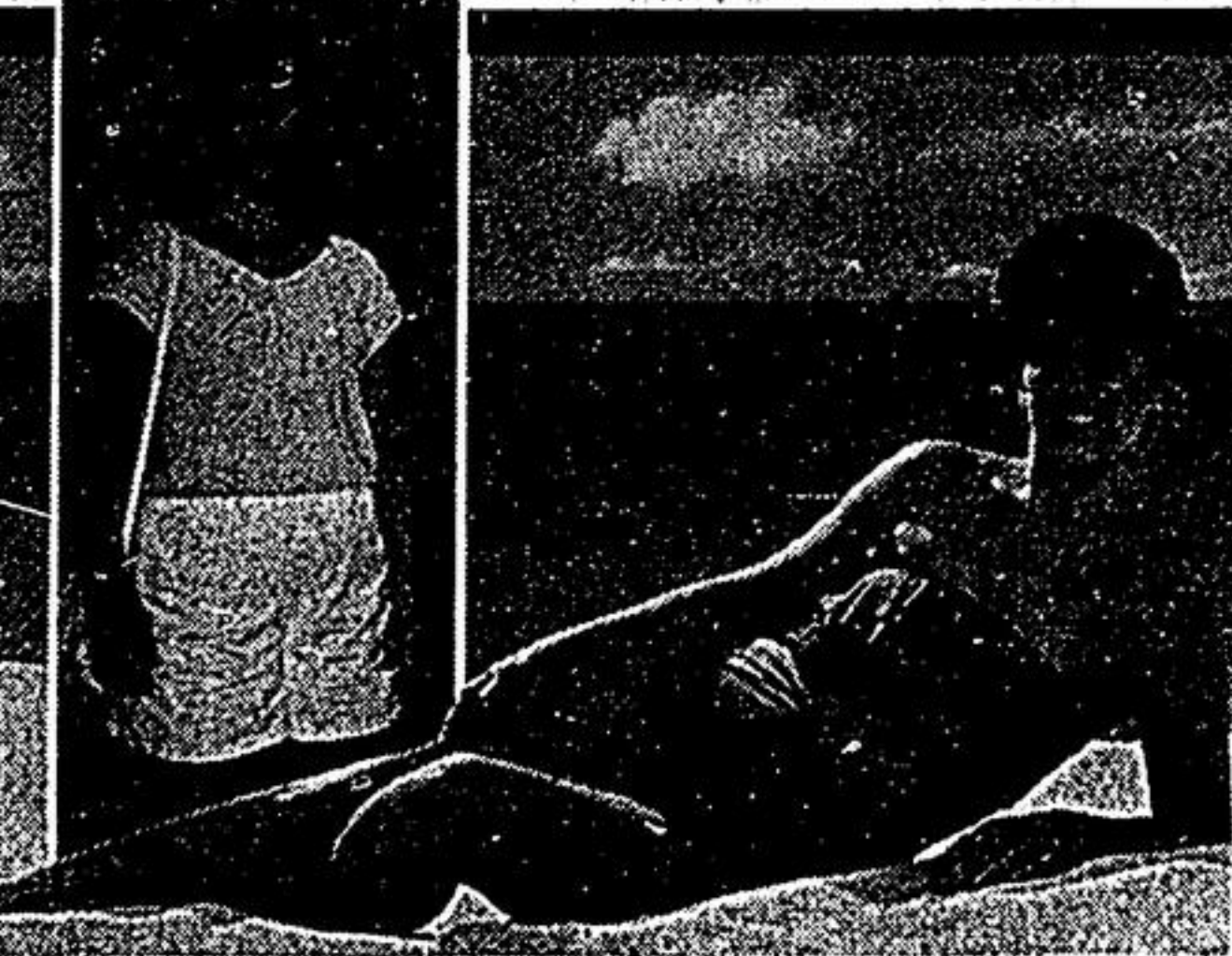
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