

Disabled teens show footloose form

KATE GILDERDALE
Correspondent

What started as a means of helping her handicapped son to socialize with other disabled young people has turned into a runaway success story for Markham resident Elaine Vollett.

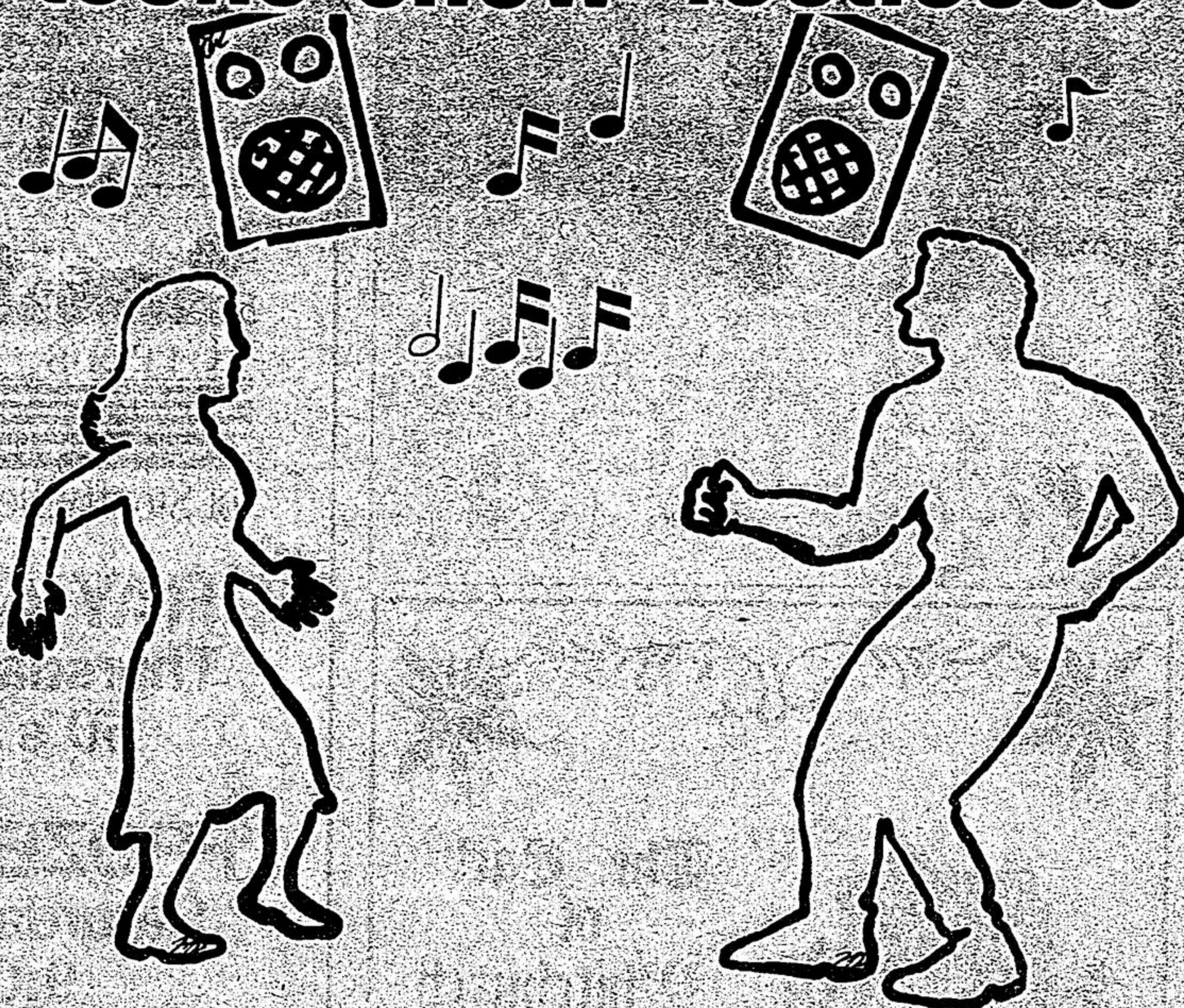
Consequently, Stouffville area residents are benefiting with a chance to meet and mingle with other disabled youth in the southern York Region area.

Almost three years ago, 19-year-old John Vollett and his family held their first dance for his friends in their home. "We felt it would be a good way for him to get together with some of the kids he knows," explains his mother. "We invited them over and a couple of other kids, who weren't handicapped, heard about it and they came along too."

One of the non-handicapped boys who joined them was Kevin Blomerley, a family friend. "He came initially just to dance, but every now and then I'd find him behind our stereo, taking over from our daughter while she danced, and running the equipment; I could see he was where he wanted to be." It wasn't long before Kevin was appointed the resident deejay.

Soon after the dances started, John was enrolled at Brother Andre High School, "and we invited kids from there, including some non-handicapped teens, and suddenly we were drawing kids from all over."

As the popularity of the dances grew, the house became too small to accommodate everyone, now they take place every other Friday at James Robinson Public School.



"On an average, we draw about 50 kids a week," estimates Mrs. Vollett. "One night we had more non-handicapped than handicapped." Some of the enthusiastic participants from Whitchurch-Stouffville, are Jean Plante and award-winning athlete Tracey Garbutt, both of whom thoroughly enjoy the evening's entertainment.

"We have theme nights; I try to dress up for whatever country

or theme we're doing and we try to have the appropriate food," Mrs. Vollett declares. One major benefit is that the non-handicapped kids are so willing to help their disabled friends. "They'll pitch in and help clean up afterwards. They dance with our kids and they're not inhibited with them in any way."

A \$5 entrance fee helps towards the purchase of discs and tapes. "The school premises are

donated through Markham Parks and Recreation, and companies sometimes give refreshments."

Food and soft drinks were donated by the Raymerville Deli and Bakery and National Dry for the Nov. 10 Italian Night, adds Mrs. Vollett, "and Balloon Express supplies balloons for every dance."

Cash and equipment have also been donated by companies such

as McDonald's Restaurants and Black's Cameras, she adds. Their help is much appreciated and she hopes others will follow suit.

The dances are called Elaine's Footloose Follies, "and they're more than just dances; they're a lot of fun." She remembers when one non-handicapped kid told her, "it isn't a big deal, they (the handicapped teens) are just regular kids doing regular social things."

For John Vollett, who has mild cerebral palsy and is developmentally delayed, it's provided a whole new outlook on life. "This has been great for him, and so has his experience at Brother Andre," enthuses his mother. "Now he's out at school all day and he's not in a segregated classroom, he's taking regular Grade 10 classes."

It's been quite an experience for her as well, she stresses. "Integrating the handicapped kids with the regular kids was not what we started out to do, but it's what we ended up doing. To begin with, there were just two who weren't handicapped and it just snowballed from there." The theme nights are particularly popular, she notes. "We have to keep it interesting for all the kids."

Although it's a lot of work, "it's so much fun and so rewarding. You have to see it to understand why I do it." If proof was ever needed that integration works, Elaine Vollett has provided it.

One of the non-handicapped teens, talking about the disabled youngsters, summed it up perfectly. "They're just regular kids. Sometimes it takes young people to show the rest of us the way."

Living Nativity planned at Mount Zion again

CHRIS SHANAHAN
Correspondent

Mount Zion United Church is gearing up for its second annual Christmas presentation of *The Living Nativity*.

The outdoor musical about the birth of Christ will be performed by members of the small Pickering-area congregation Sunday, Dec. 10, at 6:30 p.m. and again at 8.

Don Jamieson, the play's narrator, says the churchyard pro-

vides a natural setting for the elaborate production.

"The townspeople and the shepherds are out in the yard. We have sheep penned off and there's a fire for the shepherds to sit around. And Mary comes riding in on a donkey," Mr. Jamieson says.

An old horse shed on the property is an ideal prop. "The front is open so we put the manger scene in the front of this shed."

Mr. Jamieson says at least 50

people help to stage the production, which last year attracted nearly 400 spectators despite bitterly cold temperatures.

"Last year, we were even fortunate enough to have a real baby. I don't know if we'll be that lucky this year or not."

"People didn't believe it was a real infant, but it cried through quite a bit of the first performance, so this let them know we actually did have a baby."

"The person playing Joseph did a tremendous job of rocking

the baby to try and quiet it. That went over quite well."

Mount Zion minister Sharon Patterson came up with the idea to stage a living nativity after deciding the church property was a perfect setting.

Mr. Jamieson says churchgoers are enthusiastic about the project and everyone seems to have a lot of fun.

"We were kind of dubious at first, but then we got into it and everyone really enjoyed it. Right away, they said 'this has got to be an annual thing.'"

Everyone is hoping for milder weather this year so audience members can be comfortable through the half-hour play, Mr. Jamieson says.

A freewill offering will be taken during both performances.

Rev. Patterson penned the original script and she also serves as producer/director.

Organist Victoria Middleton is the musical director, leading a 25-voice choir.

Mount Zion is located on Pickering's Conc. 8, southwest of Balsam Rd.

Collective crisis shapes up for baby boomers

You know you're middle-aged when things get on your nerves to an increasing extent, but at the same time you start deriving a certain satisfaction from the irritation they cause.

Maybe righteous indignation is today's hottest emotion because the baby boomers, despite strenuous denials, are starting to reach the unwelcome benchmark of a collective mid-life crisis.

In the process, an earnest desire to put the world to rights has replaced the carefree laissez-faire attitude of the '60s. Forget tolerance and free love, here comes the reformation.

Boomers are attacking problems, real and imaginary, with a zeal previously reserved for the Spanish Inquisition. Absent-minded professors with an eye for attractive young women are being dragged up before boards



kate's corner

kate gilderdale

of inquiry and banned from swimming pools.

Infantile university students are getting national media coverage for a series of tasteless and pathetic pranks, which would be much better dealt with quietly by the administration.

Terminology, which was once perfectly acceptable, is now deemed insulting. The physically and mentally handicapped are "challenged" rather than "disabled"; the term native is regarded as a slur, and I recently read that it's no longer right to refer to so-

meone as a Jew; henceforth they shall be known as Jewish.

Too bad no one seems to have informed the Jewish people in Israel, who are still proud to call themselves Jews.

I used to think, like the character in *A Chorus Line*, that the only thing I wanted to be when I grew up was young.

Now I've decided I really don't mind being old. In fact, I'd rather be old than a senior citizen, but that's out of the question. Old is an adjective that leads to

stereotyping, which is practically a capital crime these days.

As for inflammatory headlines, they're something that today's hapless editor must find hard to avoid. Still, there can't be anyone left alive who doesn't know you never, ever refer to a woman as a mother in a news item.

It's all right to call her office manager, or chairperson of IBM, but dare to describe her as a mere mother and you can start cleaning out your desk.

The rationale behind this is that men are never referred to as fathers in headlines. Just because men may have their priorities mixed up doesn't mean women have to fall into the same trap.

Of all the things I've done in my life, I still think being a mother is

the most important and I'm finding it difficult to work up to the appropriate degree of outrage on this sensitive issue.

But the real reason I'm writing this piece is because I'm worried. There's a dangerously high proportion of females writing for a living and that doesn't bode well for the future.

Now that the reformers are starting to insist on a government quota system to ensure that every office and profession has the correct percentage of both the advantaged (healthy WASP males) and the disadvantaged (everyone else), my days at the computer could be numbered.

I'm just wondering how long it will be before I'm reassigned to sheet metal work to help redress the balance.