

Boy with a bubble

Former Stouffville resident Bruce Walden returns to decorate for Reunion '91

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Correspondent

When Bruce Walden attended the University of Western Ontario to study first chemistry and then occupational therapy, a career in balloons was not uppermost in his mind.

However, as owner of BalloonArt, the 27-year-old entrepreneur has no regrets at the drastic change in his plans. Former students of Stouffville

District Secondary School will be able to admire his handiwork when they attend Reunion '91, one of the many projects he has undertaken since he opened his Toronto store just over a year ago.

The roots of his present livelihood go back to Western. "Because of clinical placements I couldn't have regular jobs in the summer," explained Walden. "I worked part-time throughout the year and one of my jobs was as



Bruce Walden of Balloon Art is decorating the Rec Centre this week.

a singing telegram performer.

"I also delivered balloons while I was doing my occupational therapy degree and we did balloon decorating in the company I worked for. When I graduated with my second degree, I moved to the Kitchener-Waterloo area, worked as an occupational therapist and opened a retail store at the same time."

Among the services offered at the store was balloon decorating, and the success of the venture persuaded Walden to re-think his future. When he opened his first store in late 1987, he offered a full line of services which

included balloon decorating, deliveries and singing telegrams.

Nowadays the business is focused on decorating for events such as corporate promotions, weddings and other large functions. BalloonArt can come up with concepts, create special effects and make everything from clowns to corporate logos out of balloons.

"We can create special effects for sales meetings, promotions and conventions, and we also decorate for private events such as bar mitzvahs and weddings," he said. "We've worked for Coca-Cola, McDonald's and several major malls including Markville, Scar-

borough and Sherway Gardens. BalloonArt designed and installed the display at the opening of Terminal Three at Pearson International Airport earlier this year, and local residents will remember the spectacular Valentine's display at Markville Shopping Centre, which was also designed by the company.

BalloonArt uses only the best quality, biodegradable balloons. "They're made from the sap of the rubber tree which is tapped in much the same way maples are tapped for syrup, so it's a completely natural substance," Walden pointed out. "Our balloons are definitely environmentally friendly."

Although he spent much of his youth in Lindsay, he and his family lived in Stouffville from 1966 to 1970. During that time his father, William, was a teacher at SDSS and he himself attended kindergarten and Grade 1 at Summitview.

In addition to offering balloon decorating services, Walden teaches courses in his specialty both in Canada and internationally. "I provide classes in Toronto for people such as florists, and I'm going to Texas in August and Nevada in November, to teach people who are closer to my level." He also hopes to teach in Australia this fall.

Prices can vary between \$200 and about \$10,000, depending on the complexity of the design, the time it takes to set up and the number of people needed to install it. Where budgets are limited, clients can hire Walden to organize volunteers to do the installation themselves.

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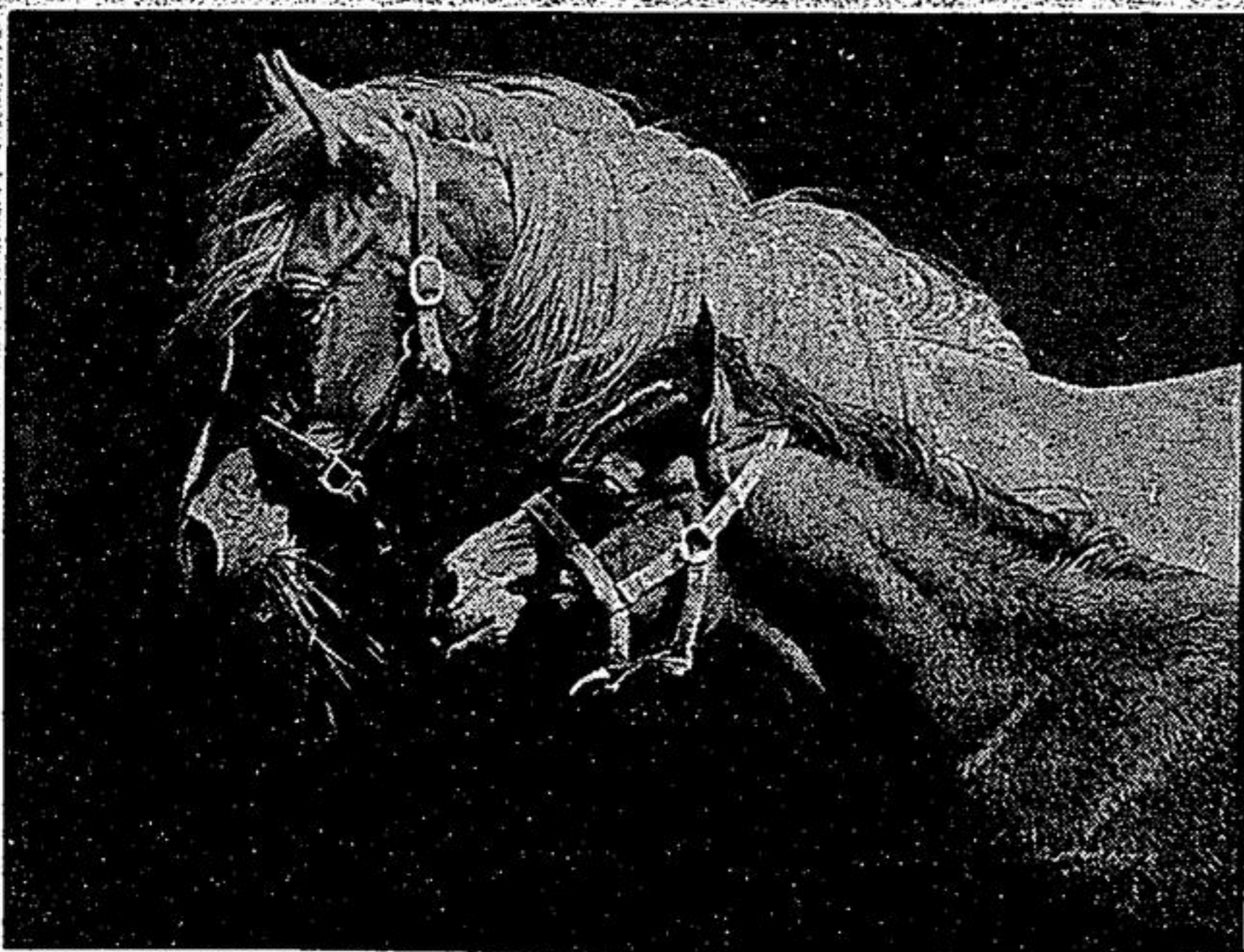
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