

EDUCATION: Advertising scheme on boards' buses a great disappointment'

School bus ad plan a bust

BY PATRICK CASEY
STAFF WRITER

School bus advertising is a bust in York Region.

Two years after the joint board consortium of the public and Catholic school boards began selling advertising inside and outside buses, there are only two ads on just 12 of the region's 800 buses — Fuzzy Peach candy and Uniform Basis. And there is no national advertising agency drumming up fancy logos and slogans for new clients.

"It's been a real loser," Richmond Hill Trustee Denis Middleton said.

"We have made some money, but not for the amount of work we have put in. It looked good but then it collapsed when the second company didn't produce. I don't think many people really liked the idea to begin with, but let's be honest, it was done out of a straight case of dollars and cents issue.

"It's been a great disappointment to us," he added.

More importantly, initial estimates of an annual \$1.3-million profit are nothing more than a pipe dream now.

And Toronto's Gaylord Group, the national advertising agency hired by the consortium in 1988 to drum up

business and design ads, backed out of its contract in August after dismissing most of the key staff in the bus advertising division earlier in the year.

In doing so, they walked away from a deal with a two-year option that would have automatically kicked in if \$800,000 in revenue was met next year and another \$1.2 million in 2000.

One of Canada's largest and oldest advertising firms, Gaylord had replaced Richmond Hill's M 2000 Group in October 1997, after the initial 12-month pilot project received mixed reviews and a meager \$250,000 profit.

"They never sold a thing between November and August," said David Martin, the region's manager of transportation services. "Their people just disappeared."

"We really thought we had caught hold of something that was going to fly and take off for us. I'm still getting one or two phone calls a week from people interested in advertising. It's been a learning curve for the school board people and it's still a fledging product, but it would be nice to be taking a little profit."

Frank Dacosta knows all about the trials and tribulations of using school

bus advertising, having been a market consultant for Charterways bus company in 1990 before founding School Bus Media (SBM) in London a year later.

The poster-sized ads measuring 81 centimetres wide and 56 cm high remain, while a new king-sized edition that covers the entire lower panel of the bus has been added.

Customers can also purchase an ad for a minimum eight-week run at a base price of \$110 a month for one bus.

"Ads have to be tied to the medium, and we received a lot of attention from the likes of McDonald's, Coke and Microsoft because they get exposure to the schools and to the general public," Dacosta said. "Companies look like the good guys supporting education."

"This is a breakthrough type of advertising that's totally different and unique. We have a critical and powerful consumer and maybe 10 years from now, we have a lawyer who once travelled as a kid on a school bus with ads and it taught him something about advertising."

"There is a role for this, but perhaps the role is not as important as we originally thought."



Joan Ransberry

Counting my blessings, on the job

When I count my blessings, having a job is always at the top of my list.

Unemployment scares the bejesus out of me. I'd rather face a serious illness than be out of work. If I was sick, the chances of a doctor fixing me are fairly high. If I was out of work at age 53, the odds of me finding another job would be slim.

Few companies hire anyone over 50. Despite the fact that rejecting people over 50 is neither fair, right or sensible, it still happens. You don't hear much about it — nobody talks about.

We're living in a 35 to 40-year-old management climate. With the exception of a few cases, the very young and the 50-plus don't fit in.

The fact that the young and the not-so-young can be the most creative, the most energetic and the most loyal doesn't count for much.

One saving grace is the young people and the over 50s finally have something in common: We're willing and able to work. It's the convincing that's difficult.

Here are the most up-to-date unemployment figures. The national unemployment rate is 7.7 per cent. It's 6.7 per cent in Ontario, and 6.6 per cent in York Region.

Canada's youth unemployment rate tells a different story. A staggering 14.7 per cent of our youth are out of work.

IT'S A CRIME

While it's a crime to have so many young people classified jobless, something is being done. A Stouffville-based neighbourhood employment initiative is now open for business.

The Neighbourhood Employment Resource Centre, located at the Stouffville District Secondary School, is a going concern, offering full-time, one-on-one counseling and high-tech help.

A few years ago, the plight of the jobless dominated the front pages of newspapers. An improved economy didn't solve the problem of the jobless youth. Figures show that youth unemployment didn't go away. It just dropped from favour.

The media recognizes that the public has the attention span of a hummingbird. If the media continued to feed the public the jobless youth story, the public would lose its appetite.

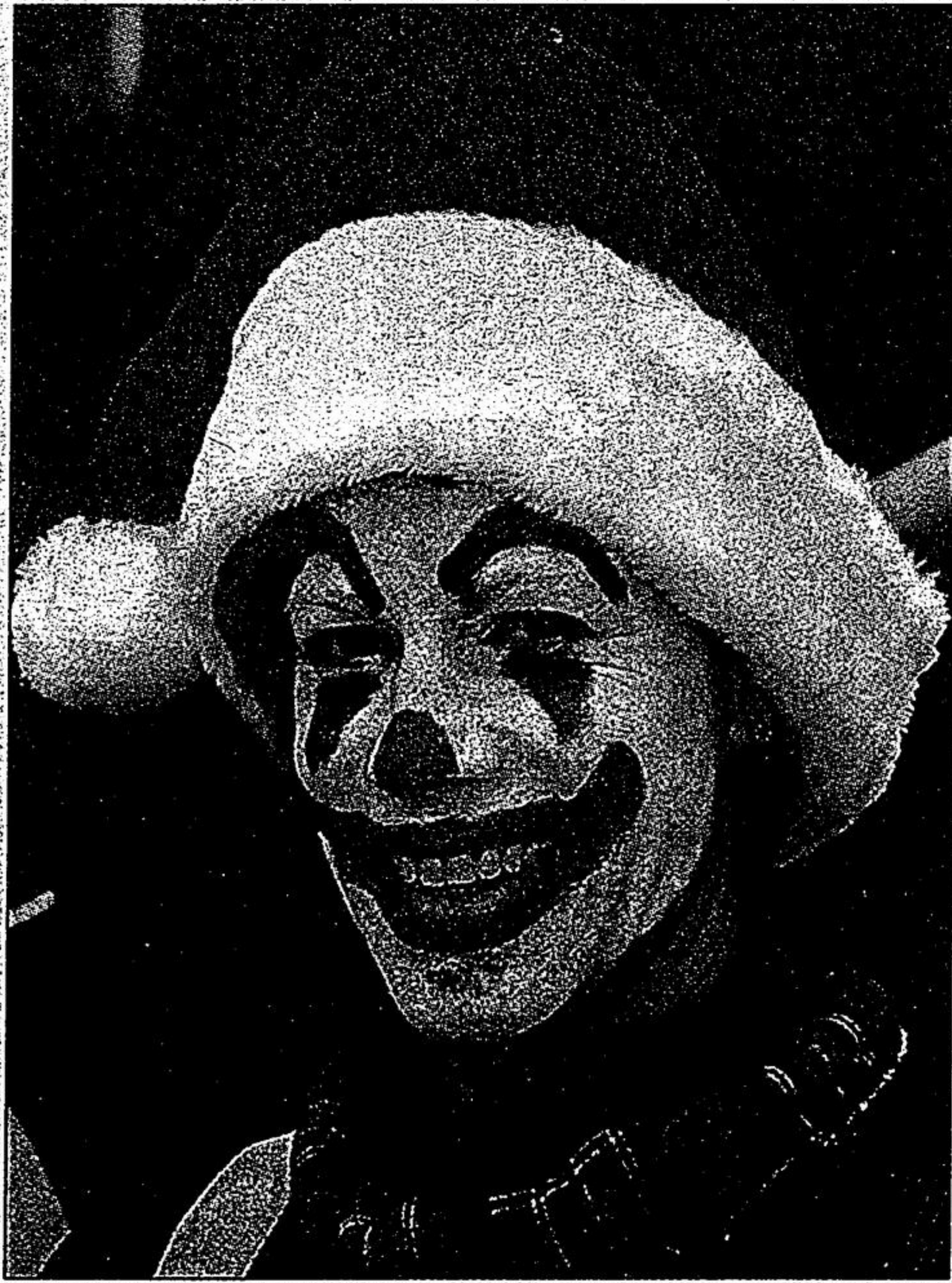
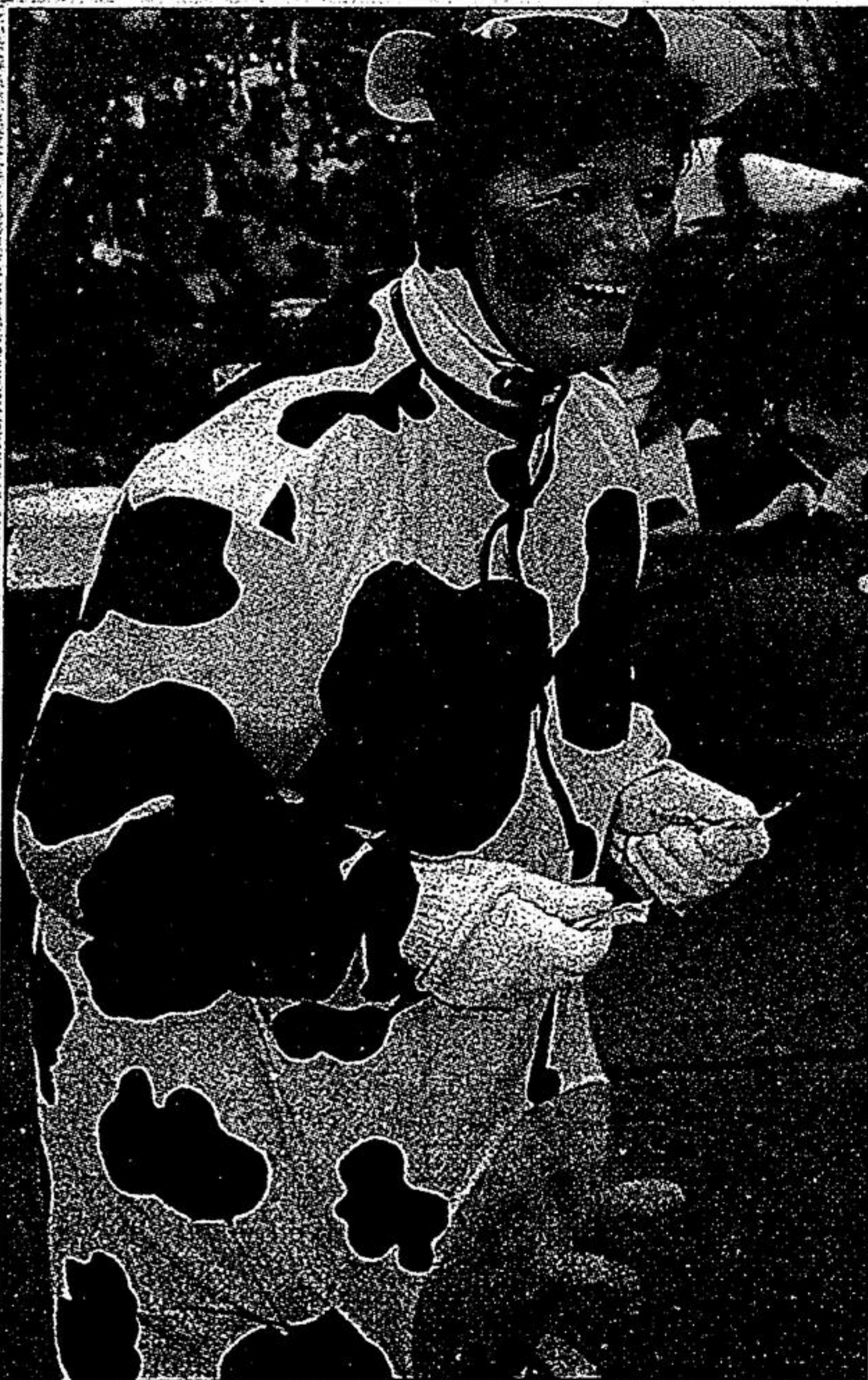
Some stories last longer than others. Sex, crime, violence and accidents lead the pack. The jobless can't compete.

But there is hope. The new centre expects to help 500 Stouffville residents this year. The unemployed and those looking to switch careers have access to employment facilitators, employability skills workshops, access to Internet employment postings, photocopy and fax, and video, print and CD Rom resources.

A client using the internet's job log could eventually secure a job far away from home. The link to the job market goes Canada-wide, opening up opportunities for the users.

If I had only one bit of advise to give to young people it would be, leave home. Pack your bags, give mom and dad a thank you hug and split. As well as finding a job, you'll find yourself.

PARADING AROUND TOWN



PHOTOS/LORI EMMERSON

Betty Ferguson of Harper's Meats and Audrey O'Hanley are just two of the participants who helped make this year's Santa Claus Parade one of the best ever.

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