

Dads can find focus at support group

Participant in course returns as volunteer to help other dads

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

Helping a man become a father is no easy task, a Markham architect is learning. Ken Chow is one of a dozen men to recently finish a seven-week parenting program, designed exclusively for fathers.

Chow was so impressed with Focus on Fathers, he's returning to the spring program as a volunteer.

Chow, 40, and his wife Nancy, 37, welcomed baby Michael to the family almost two years ago. Like all new dads, Chow wondered if the new merry-go-round life would be a challenge.

"Attending the Focus on Fathers program last fall strengthened my relationship with both my wife and son," Chow said.

Focus on Fathers is a free program designed to give dads insight, information and strategies on parenting children, from newborns to six-year olds.

It's a joint project of the Catholic Community Services of York Region and York Region Early Intervention Services.

"This course is unique," Chow said. "While there are plenty of support groups for mothers, there are none for dads. Fathers need support, too; fathers need back-and-forth discussion; fathers need to get things off their chests; fathers need anger management; we need information on child development and, yes, we need stress management. Focus on Fathers does a great deal to help fathers."

Last week, Chow returned to act as a host for the sessions offered in Markham. Focus on Fathers is also available in Woodbridge and Keswick.

Focus on Fathers is gaining popularity, according to program director George Glover.

"We are exceeding our expectations and we're now offering it at three locations," he said. "The sessions will be presented by a family therapist, an educator, a dietitian and by three family physicians."

As a volunteer, Chow will encourage the men to talk about the unique and sometimes scary situations in which fathers find themselves. As well, Chow hopes to get the participants to pick up useful parenting skills.

Doctors in York Region are invited to refer patients to Focus on Fathers.

The Markham program, which began March 9, runs from 7 to 9 p.m. at Pathways Parent and Child Resource Centre at 70 Main St., Markham.

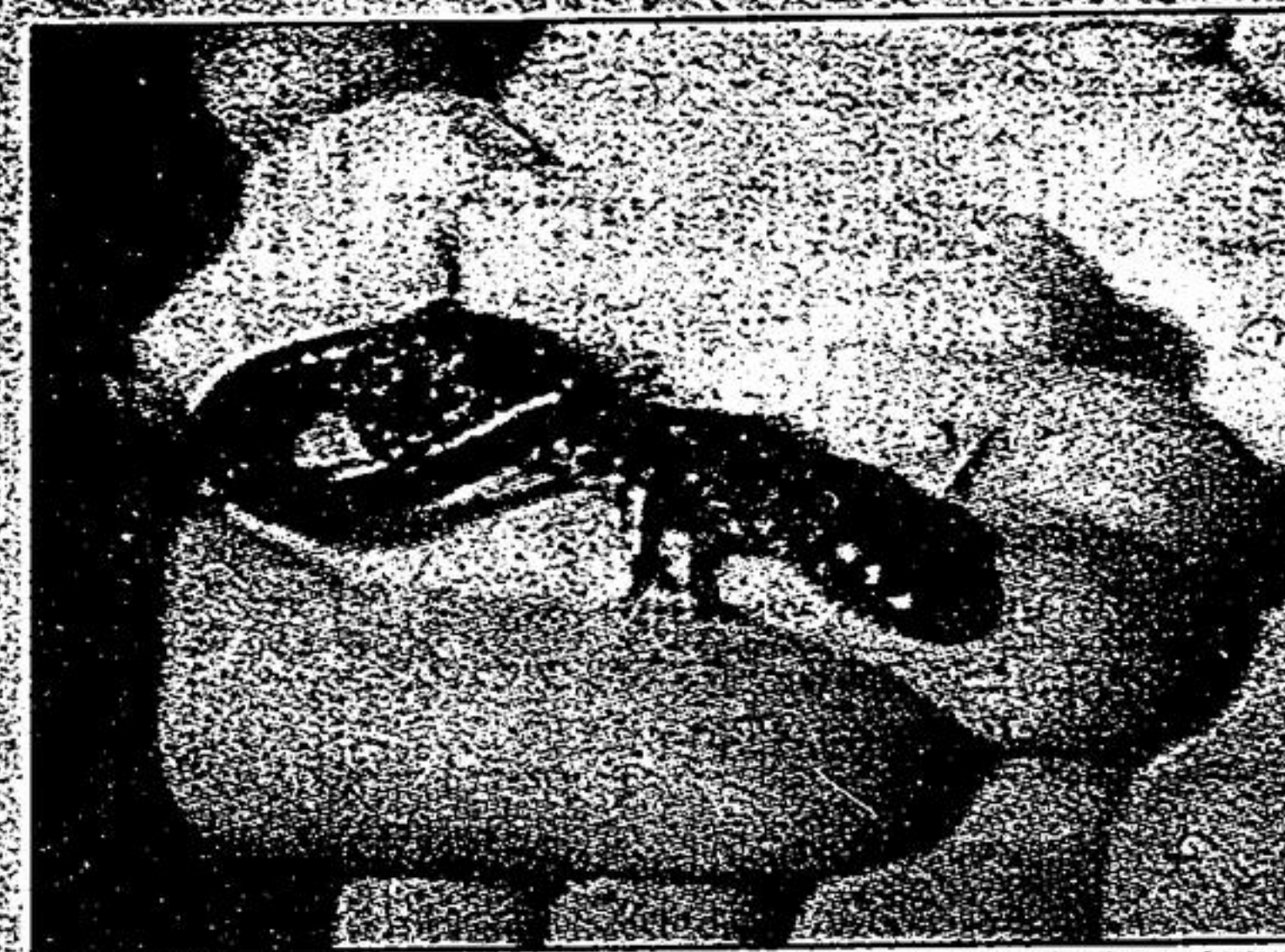
The program is offered in Woodbridge starting on March 22 from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Market Lane Child Parent Resource Centre at 166 Woodbridge Ave. Beginning April 1 from noon to 2 p.m., the seven-week Focus on Fathers program gets underway in Keswick.

For more information on Focus on Fathers, call 1-800-263-2075.

VOLUNTEERS FOLLOW THE AMPHIBIOUS CALL OF THE WILD IN YORK REGION



A gray tree frog (left) and a blue spotted salamander are native to the Rouge watershed. Volunteers will be looking for these and other species this spring.



Music of the night

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

In the middle of a rainy night this week, driving slowly with her flashers on, Natalie Helferty recognized tiny outlines by the road.

Spring peepers, tan frogs barely an inch long, were moving across Leslie Street.

"It was warm enough (for frogs to migrate) and it was nice and rainy," said Helferty, a biologist and member of the Richmond Hill Naturalists.

Amphibian life is stirring again in York Region as frogs and salamanders leave winter holes for the wet places they will inhabit in spring and summer.

FROGS ARE CALLING FOR MATES

And scores of people, trained as volunteers, will be standing beside wetlands linked to the Don, Humber and Rouge River watershed, listening for the strangely beautiful sounds of male frogs calling to mates.

Next week, groups working along the Rouge and in Richmond Hill are looking for more frogwatchers who will observe the migrations or record the calling frogs.

Last year, volunteers for the first year of the Rouge River Watershed Amphibian Monitoring Program heard more than expected.

Armed with a tape of calls from 12 frog species, they recognized the sounds of all nine who historically inhabited the Greater Toronto Area.

The ecological survey of Rouge Park in 1991 had found only six. "I think everybody has been shocked by what we've got," Dan Casselman, co-ordinator of the Rouge frogwatch, said this week beside the pond at Bruce's Mill Conservation Area in Stouffville, a marsh with shallow areas and vegetation frogs use to hide.

Here, the program's dedicated listeners heard distinct sounds of the wood frog, spring peeper, American toad, green frog, pickerel frog and the northern leopard frog, which Casselman said, "kind of clucks like a chicken at first and then sounds like a balloon being rubbed with wet hand."

SALAMANDERS INCH THEIR WAY ALONG

Somewhere, the mysterious salamanders, slow-moving in the cold, were also inching their way along. The program, a project of the Rouge River Restoration Committee, will also be searching for signs of them.

On Wednesday, Helferty saw two frogs, one northern leopard and one green, cross Bathurst Street in Richmond Hill. She also counted 13 dead ones at the same spot. Studies, she added, suggest traffic kills 30 per cent of migrating frogs.

The diversity of frog species in the GTA appears in decline,



DAN CASSELMAN: Co-ordinates the frog watch along the Rouge

with areas on the Oak Ridges Moraine being an exception, said Helferty.

"I definitely think urban sprawl has had an effect."

Most frogwatching along the Don and Humber has focused on Toronto, not the headwaters of those rivers in York Region.

There has also been no formal survey of frog haunts in Richmond Hill, Helferty said.

Frogs seen moving this week were males, she said. "The next rainy night the females will be moving to follow them, because they hear the calls."

The amorous males may call in daylight but the most intense calling is usually between dusk and 10 p.m.

Last year, Amy Darker, volunteer frogwatcher for the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, learned to distinguish and record the frogs calling from the pond in her rural Vaughan backyard.

Frogwatching isn't a hard job if you're prepared to listen regularly, she said.

"It's peaceful, it's quiet. You're hearing noises you never noticed before."

Lionel Normand, a TRCA biologist who co-ordinates the Don and Humber frogwatchers, said the authority is working on a program to monitor all terrestrial life in the region and will not train new volunteers this year.

TRAIN TO BE A FROGWATCHER

These are free frogwatch training sessions set for next week:

On Tuesday in Stouffville, 7:30-9:30 p.m. at Bruce's Mill Conservation Area on Stouffville Road.

On Thursday in Markham, 7-9 p.m. at the Markham Community Library on Hwy. 7 at Hwy. 48.

On Friday in Richmond Hill, 7:30-9:30 p.m., at St. John's Anglican Church on Yonge Street.

For more information, call Dan Casselman at the Rouge River Restoration Committee, (416) 284-0257.

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