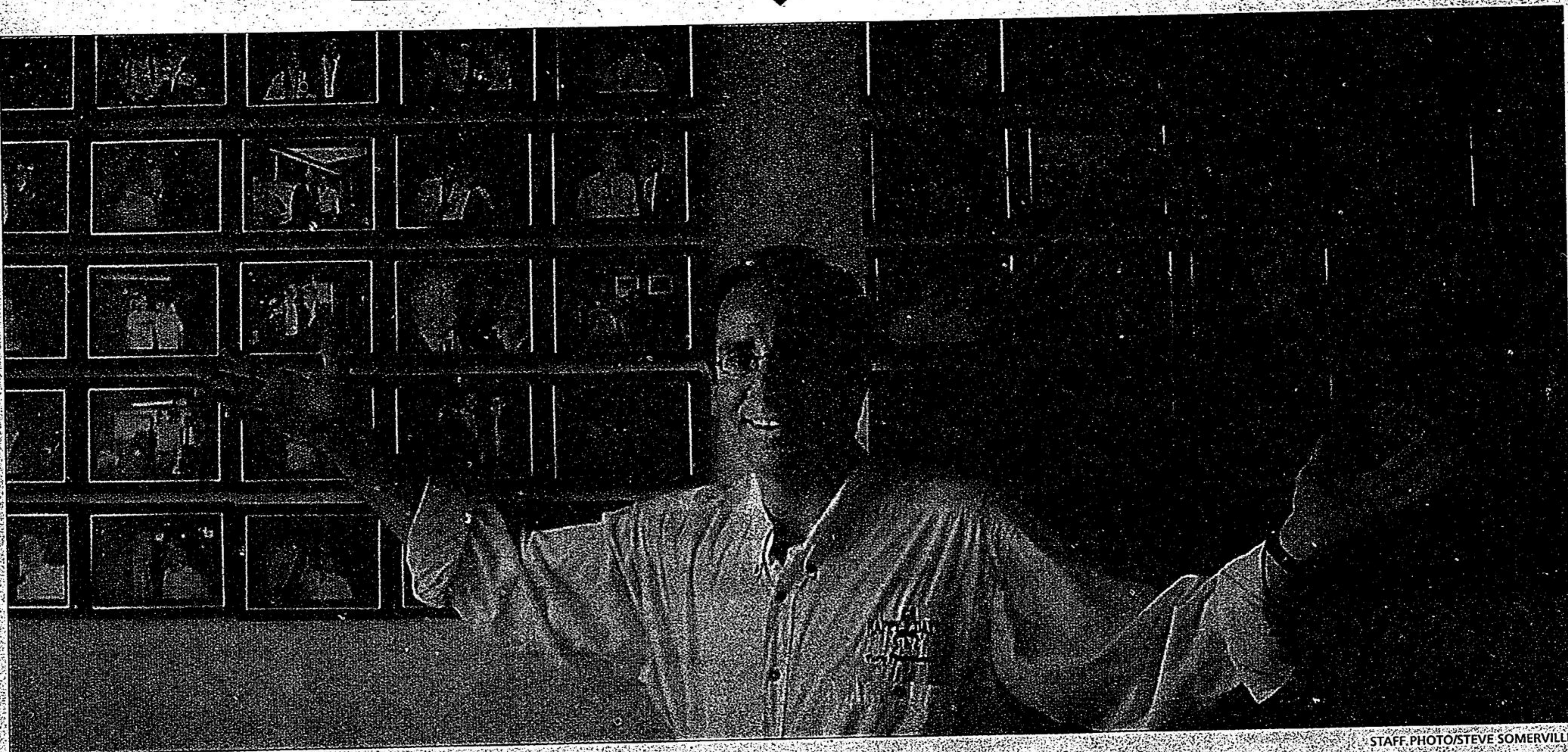


ETCETERA



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Richard Winkler is a pro at being in the right place at the right time to meet celebrities and he has a wall full of photos to prove it.

Close encounters of the celebrity kind

BY DAWN LIERSCH
Staff Writer

You could call Richard Winkler a celebrity sleuth.

Everytime he hears about a movie or television commercial on location, he stakes out the site in hope of meeting one of the actors. When there's a play or concert, he'll wait patiently by the stage door for a star to make an exit.

Sure, he's had a few brushoffs — one tough-guy actor who'll remain unnamed actually threatened to call the cops — but Winkler says most celebrities will graciously comply with his request for a quick photo with them. After all, they wouldn't be where they are today

without fans.

As a result, Winkler has photos of himself with about 150 celebrities, from Luciano Pavarotti to Dustin Hoffman decorating his bedroom wall. The latest addition is a pic of himself with actress Brooke Shields who was filming a made-for-TV movie near Centre Street in Thornhill last month.

"Some people think I'm a stalker. I guess I am in a way, but I don't want anything more than to get my picture taken with them," said Winkler, a Thornhill resident, adding his interest with those in the limelight may have to do with the fact that he once considered acting himself.

"I just love celebrities. I find it

fascinating that one day they're unknown and the next they're famous."

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And Winkler is not alone. Many York Region residents have written in to tell us about their celebrity sightings.

For some, it was just a chance meeting, while others sought them out.

Some just wanted a quick autograph while others had more in-depth encounters that made a lasting impact on their lives.

Here are their stories.

Young Daniel Levine may be following in Winkler's footsteps. A huge sports fan, Levine, 12, of Thornhill, keeps his ears open for word that athletes are in the area for autograph sessions to add to his collection.

Levine has no problem approaching celebrities after having many opportunities to practice within the last year and a half.

His first encounter happened by

coincidence. While walking out of the food court at The Promenade mall in Thornhill, Levine noticed a man who looked like actor Ross Hull who plays Chris who the television show Student Bodies.

Shy about approaching the man on his own, Levine got his sister to ask the stranger if he was indeed Hull. Hull nodded and quickly changed course to greet them. Hull signed autographs for Levine, his sister and his cousins.

More recently, in early August, Levine attended a charity function for the Ronald McDonald House organized by Kris King of the Toronto Maple Leafs. Levine had

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