

Boyfriend in prom battle gets mixed reaction

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Since then, he has experienced a taste of the exposure Mr. Hall has been receiving since mid-March. His picture was plastered across television screens and Canadian newspapers late last week after he and Mr. Hall attended a gala together in Ottawa, hosted by the gay rights group Egale.

And at the Uxbridge store where he works, Mr. Dumond said it is obvious some customers now recognize him.

"Even though they won't say anything, they're either really, really nice to me or some people won't even say thanks to me. They just turn and walk out," he says.

Overall, the reaction has been generally supportive, Mr. Dumond says, noting proudly his employers and co-workers have been "great."

But he fears the small minority that either doesn't approve of Mr. Hall's fight or homosexuality in general. He says physical threats against Mr. Hall have been increasing recently.

"...they're either really, really nice to me or some people won't even say thanks to me. They just turn and walk out."

"I worry about Marc's safety," Mr. Dumond says. "The threats are coming. It's crazy. You just want it to end. But it's not going to."

Where Mr. Hall's fight is going also concerns Mr. Dumond.

Mr. Hall launched a lawsuit against Pereyema principal Michael Powers, and Durham's Catholic school board last week, seeking an injunction that will allow him to take Mr. Dumond to the school prom on May 10. He is also seeking

\$100,000 in general and aggravated damages.

"I wish it didn't have to be about money, because it was never about that. It was about going to the prom," says Mr. Dumond, though he says he understands Mr. Hall needs the money to cover his own costs.

Mr. Dumond, recently turned 21, is protective of his 17-year-old boyfriend. He worries Mr. Hall's struggle will physically exhaust him as well as taking a toll on his grades.

"Marc's my boyfriend, so I see him as a person, I don't see him as an icon," he says. "I will support him if he decides he's too exhausted to continue on."

The statement is perhaps ironic coming from the man who initially pushed Mr. Hall into fighting his school's decision. After Mr. Powers told Mr. Hall in early March he would not be allowed to bring a same-sex partner to the prom, Mr. Dumond says his boyfriend was crushed.

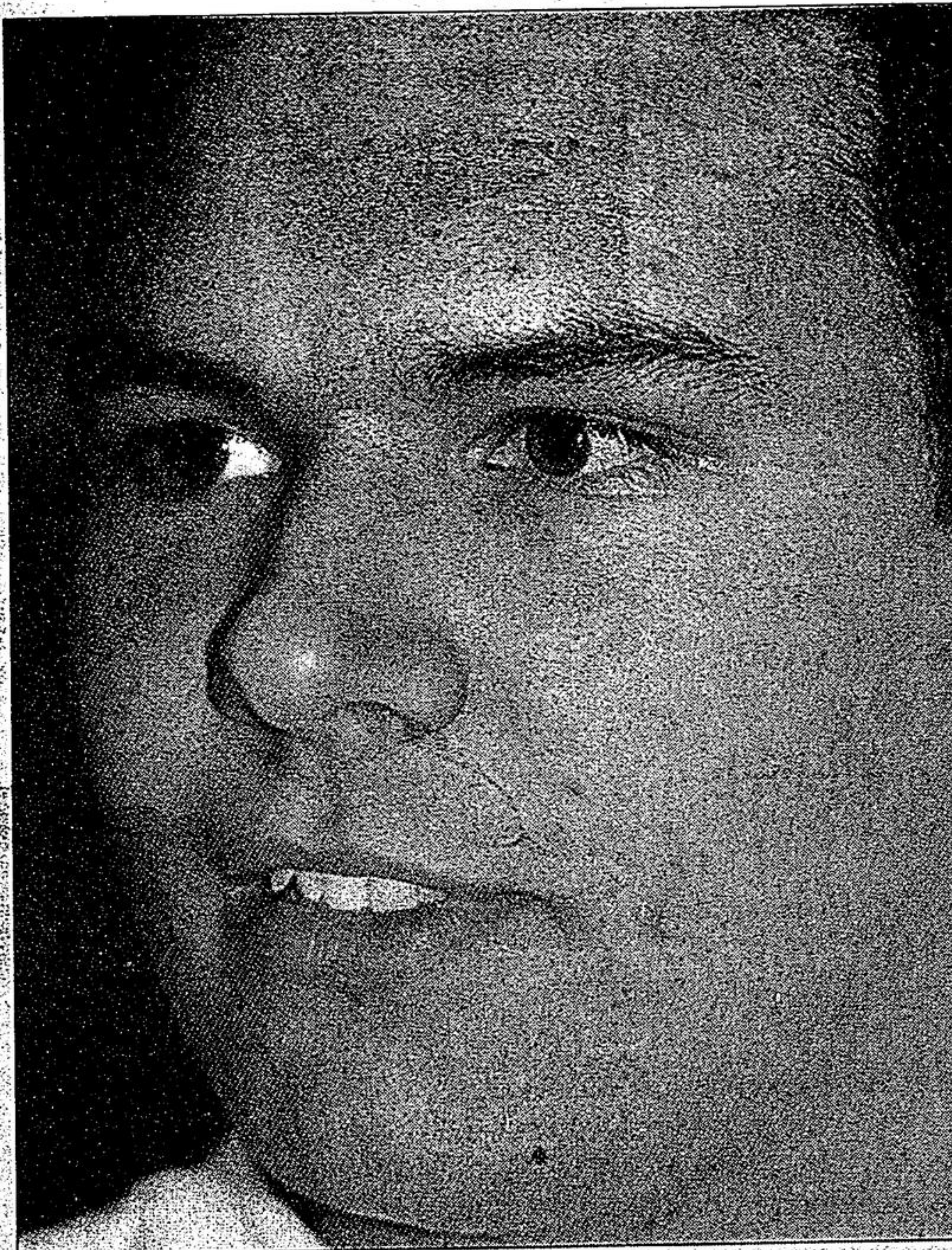
"He ended up calling me that night, he was crying and he told me," Mr. Dumond recalls. "I was angry, I was so mad."

"At the beginning, he had already given up before it started. He didn't want to go where he wasn't wanted," he continues.

Mr. Dumond says he encouraged Mr. Hall, whom he has been dating almost a year, to stand up to the school board. From there, Mr. Hall's friends picked up the fight, starting a website and soliciting media attention. That last point worried Mr. Dumond, who says now he wished he had been consulted.

"Truthfully, I felt a little excluded," Mr. Dumond says. "Their motivation behind it was great. I just wish I had been asked my opinion, but it's too late for that."

Part of his concern is the impact media attention will have on his



PHOTO/CARL FERENCZ

Former Whitchurch-Stouffville resident and Markham student Jean-Paul Dumond is part of a controversy in Durham Region. His boyfriend, Marc Hall, wants Mr. Dumond to accompany him to a prom.

parents, with whom he still lives. His mother, an emergency room nurse, is very supportive, he says. His 75-year-old father, a retired engineer, is not so enamoured.

"My dad's very hush-hush, see no evil, hear no evil. He doesn't talk about it. It bothers me immensely

but I have to accept it," Mr. Dumond says.

The family has lived in Uxbridge for the past seven years after living in nearby Whitchurch-Stouffville. Raised Catholic, Mr. Dumond attended St. Joseph elementary school and Brother Andre high

school, both in Markham.

His Catholic faith has not stayed with him.

"I can't believe in something I can't feel," he explains. "My view on it is, you don't have to be religious to have values."

Mr. Dumond says he finds it "ignorant" of others to say homosexuals like Mr. Hall should simply go to a public school if they don't like being refused entry to the prom with their same-sex partner.

Most Catholic homosexuals only come to understand their sexual orientation when they reach their early to mid-teens, he suggests, a decade after attending Catholic schools and making friends there.

He notes the Catholic Church accepts homosexuals but disapproves of homosexual acts.

"They say the prom is about sex. It isn't," he says.

Asked about concerns raised about the difference in his and Mr. Hall's age, Mr. Dumond says it's "never been an issue."

"It's not an issue for my parents, it's not an issue for Marc's parents. That's something that bugs me, when people want to live other people's life. Butt out."

Though speculation now exists Mr. Hall's fight will drum up debate over the funding of Catholic schools, Mr. Dumond says he is simply hoping the injunction goes through so that he and Mr. Hall can go to the prom.

"My mother doesn't want me to go because she fears for my safety," he admits. "I want to go to the prom because that was the intent."

"The media has taken this story and twisted it to become a war against religion, and in truth it was never that at all. It's (Marc's) prom, that's what people forget, it's his prom. It's his last night to see friends."

Residents praise region for deal to buy parkland

BY JEFF MITCHELL
Staff Writer

Residents are hailing a decision to fund a Thornhill park as a measure that preserves dwindling greenspace and protects a local historical site.

York Region councillors meeting in private session Thursday approved an unspecified amount of funding to help the Town of Markham buy a portion of Settlers Park, which the municipality had assumed it owned all along.

It may cost between \$1.2 and \$1.8 million to buy the 1.8-acre parcel, which has been maintained as parkland by the town for years, even though it is privately owned. The family that owns the land set off a furor three years

ago when it announced plans to develop it.

But the region's decision, which is contingent on other partners including the Toronto Region Conservation Authority contributing, will keep the land in public hands.

Last Thursday's announcement was applauded by supporters who attended the meeting in Newmarket.

"We're very pleased, very gratified that York Region will be part of this purchase," said JoAnn Kurtz, vice-president of the German Mills Ratepayers Association.

"(The land) is very important to the atmosphere of the German Mills area," she added. "It brings a sense of the rural history of the area into mind."

The area was among the first settled in Markham. Early settler William Berczy estab-

lished a mill and granary there.

Ms Kurtz said residents were shocked to learn in 1999 the land was privately owned and slated for development. That shock was soon translated into a widespread will to preserve the land, she said.

"People were stunned and were galvanized into immediate action," Ms Kurtz said.

Karl Mahler of the Thornhill Garden and Agricultural Society said development of the parcel would have disrupted adjoining parkland and, more importantly, represented a loss of valuable greenspace.

"I don't think you can really put a value on it," Mr. Mahler said. "It is considered an integral part of a natural heritage site."

Markham Ward 1 Councillor Erii Shapero said the region's decision is in keeping with its

stated commitment to preserve York's natural heritage. Such measures are particularly important in fast-growing municipalities like Markham, she said Thursday.

"We are a growing community and we are losing greenspace and forest cover," Ms Shapero said. "We cannot afford that and the residents of Markham recognize that."

There has been support for the preservation from throughout the municipality, Ms Shapero said.

Ms Shapero said the town's portion of the cost of the purchase will come from a recently-established land acquisition fund, which now totals \$2.4 million. Other partners will include the Evergreen Foundation, a national non-profit land protection agency, the region, and the TRCA, she said.

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