



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

When it was constructed in 1968, Whitchurch Highlands Public School was one of the province's first 'pod' concept schools. "People came from all over Ontario to see this," said principal Bill Reynolds.

## Leafs goalie among graduates of Whitchurch Highlands Elementary

BY HANNELORE VOLPE  
Staff Writer

With the help of its community, Whitchurch Highlands Public School is becoming a stepping stone—to turning out successful people.

How many schools can claim Curtis Joseph as an award-winning alumnus?

The Toronto Maple Leafs goaltender was male athlete of the year at the rural Whitchurch-Stouffville school in 1981.

Other notable events at the school at the corner of Bloomington Road and Warden Avenue?

An ongoing project is the naturalization of the school's 17-acre yard to make it more usable for students and teachers.

This year, the school is focusing on improving its students' writing and reading skills. These and other programs are designed for "the whole child," said principal Bill Reynolds.

After spending a few days at WHPS, one supply teacher was heard to comment, "This is the first school I have seen that stressed happiness."

There are 18 teachers for the school's 350 students. They are aided in their efforts by an active group of parent volunteers.

When volunteer co-ordinator Shawn Nisbet recently drew up a list of volunteers to post in the school's front foyer, it kept growing until it reached more than 100 names.

That's from a school that has perhaps 200 families. "We are looking at making the community a partner with the school," the principal said.

The school is still surrounded by farm fields and all of its 350 students travel to school by bus.

A few years ago, the school council, of which current Whitchurch-Stouffville councillor Harry Bowes was then a member, was instrumental in having the speed limit reduced on Bloomington Road and having a traffic light installed at the corner of Bloomington and Warden.

Whitchurch Highlands Public School was built in 1968, as one of Ontario's first "pod" concept schools. "People came from all over Ontario to see this," said Mr. Reynolds.

The gymnasium sits in the centre of the building and the classrooms are arranged around its perimeter.

In the 1960s the "pod" concept meant that large classrooms would be used by many classes that would ideally create free form "pods" according to the activity of the moment.

When the pod concept didn't pan out, the giant rooms were divided into separate classrooms.

When Mr. Reynolds came to the school two years ago, he was struck by the tiny size of the library.

Shortly after, he started planning to

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have a new gym built onto the school for \$750,000. Once that happens, the current gym will be turned into a more elaborate library.

There are currently two reading rooms for the students. The school council donated about \$4,000 for the primary reading room's books two years ago and contributed another \$5,000 last year for books for the intermediate reading room, which opened in time for this academic year.

Last year, the school council sponsored a writer who came to the school for workshops with students and parents invited.

The school council is working on "maintaining an active reserve of volunteers and seeking input of staff," said Gord Kerr, who has been council chair for the past three years.

To further the school's focus on improving students' writing abilities, the First Steps program has been implemented with teachers required to complete 15 hours of training.

"Raising readers", which will feature in-school workshops, is designed to get

preschoolers reading by teaching their parents how to properly read to them.

The teachers have made it their priority to improve school/community relations, Mr. Reynolds noted.

One way is by holding informal lunches to which parents can come and talk with the teachers.

Teachers are also working on a program that will help them to evaluate their students better.

Students can be part of a wide variety of activities, including the band—which will give an outdoor concert in the school park on Tuesday—as well as sports and academic clubs.

The art club, open to youngsters in Grades 2 and up, meets weekly under the guidance of a graphic artist. The school's girls' volleyball and boys' basketball teams have won numerous titles in recent years.

A feeling of mutual respect and safety in the school is being fostered by the Future Aces program which rewards good behaviour through an anti-bullying campaign with an emphasis on character education.

Mr. Reynolds has noticed that students are now more confident about reporting incidents of bullying because they understand that they can be dealt with "before they become a major problem."

The schoolyard has been transformed over the past few years, with the help of fundraising by the school council, with the addition of several outdoor classrooms and several items of playground equipment.

The council decided on an innovative use of the yard after existing playground equipment was deemed unsafe.

There are the outdoor structures that are a natural meeting place for the older students and sports games for the younger students.

Next on the playground to-do list is a new slide structure. The marshy area on the 17-acre site is used for a nature study and science area.

The ball diamond was refurbished last year and the school's soccer fields are used for games by the Whitchurch-Stouffville Soccer Club.

## 'She changed my life,' says former student

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years, beginning at Maple's Our Lady of Peace Catholic School. She moved to St. Justin in 1999 because of the appeal of teaching Markham students.

"I live in Markham and it's wonderful to be able to teach in my home community."

Before she left Our Lady of Peace, Mrs. Cushing Dill had a big impact on Melissa Sudor. Now 16, Melissa noted "you have picked the right person. She changed my life."

"I was in her class in Grade 7 and she taught us how to change the world. Mrs. Cushing Dill's slogan was 'think globally, act locally'."

At St. Justin, Mrs. Cushing Dill teaches Grade 8, instructing students on all subjects except history and

geography.

Her nomination for teacher of the month shows how much more her students believe she gives to them. She said teaching comes naturally, because students are amenable to new ideas.

Mrs. Cushing Dill said she is honoured to be recognized for something she believes is a necessary and reciprocating process.

"I think we all teach," she said. "I just do it formally. I am very passionate about my profession and about student learning and participation."

"We have wonderful young people who care and want to make a contribution."

Nominations for June's teacher of the month are now being accepted, with the deadline on June 13. See our address on page 6.

## Students march against male violence

BY CAMILLA CHEUNG  
At The Schools Writer

Thousands of York Region students congregated at Thornhill Secondary School May 16 for the ninth annual Walk Against Male Violence.

In spite of the steady drizzle and ankle-deep puddles, more than 2,500 teenagers protested violence against women and to raise money to benefit women's organizations.

The long column of students made its way from Thornhill Secondary to Thornlea Secondary School, a five-kilometre hike, sporting hand-made banners and signs protesting violence against women.

The group was encour-

aged and supported by student organizers from both schools, as well as local bands and speakers.

With plenty of enthusiasm, the walk was a spirited, optimistic event.

"It feels good to be making a difference. That's why I do it every year," said Andrea Sprakman, an OAC student at Aurora High School.

"Domestic violence is one of the most serious social issues in Canada. People driving down the street can see that young people have this cause, that they want to stop male violence."

Many students are passionate about the cause.

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## Networking helps in job search

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and I just followed my interests," Vanessa Lam, OAC student at Brother André Catholic High School in Markham, says.

Students tend to be more successful when they network and ask friends or relatives for job leads. Often internships and volunteering are another option.

"Volunteer work can lead to better jobs and higher pay," Vanessa says.

Although there is no money involved, there are

valuable experience and job skills that can be learned. Often, the non-paying experience will lead to a regular paying job, regardless of age.

As Gillian says, "Younger teens should concentrate on their attitude and strengths. They shouldn't let their age get in the way and stop them from looking for a job."

Paula Lam is a student at St. Augustine Catholic High School in Unionville.