

SPORTS

Boarding craze in full flight

BY JOHN CUDMORE
Staff Writer

Give a kid some stairs, a handrail or street curb, throw in a set of wheels and chances are you have a happy skateboarder.

Unless he's into quarter and half-pipes, in which case he's more into vert.

Funny lot, teenagers these days. On the upside, at least those community-access playthings don't cost parents a cent. But do you really want your kid sailing top-to-bottom down a flight of stairs in the name of expressing himself?

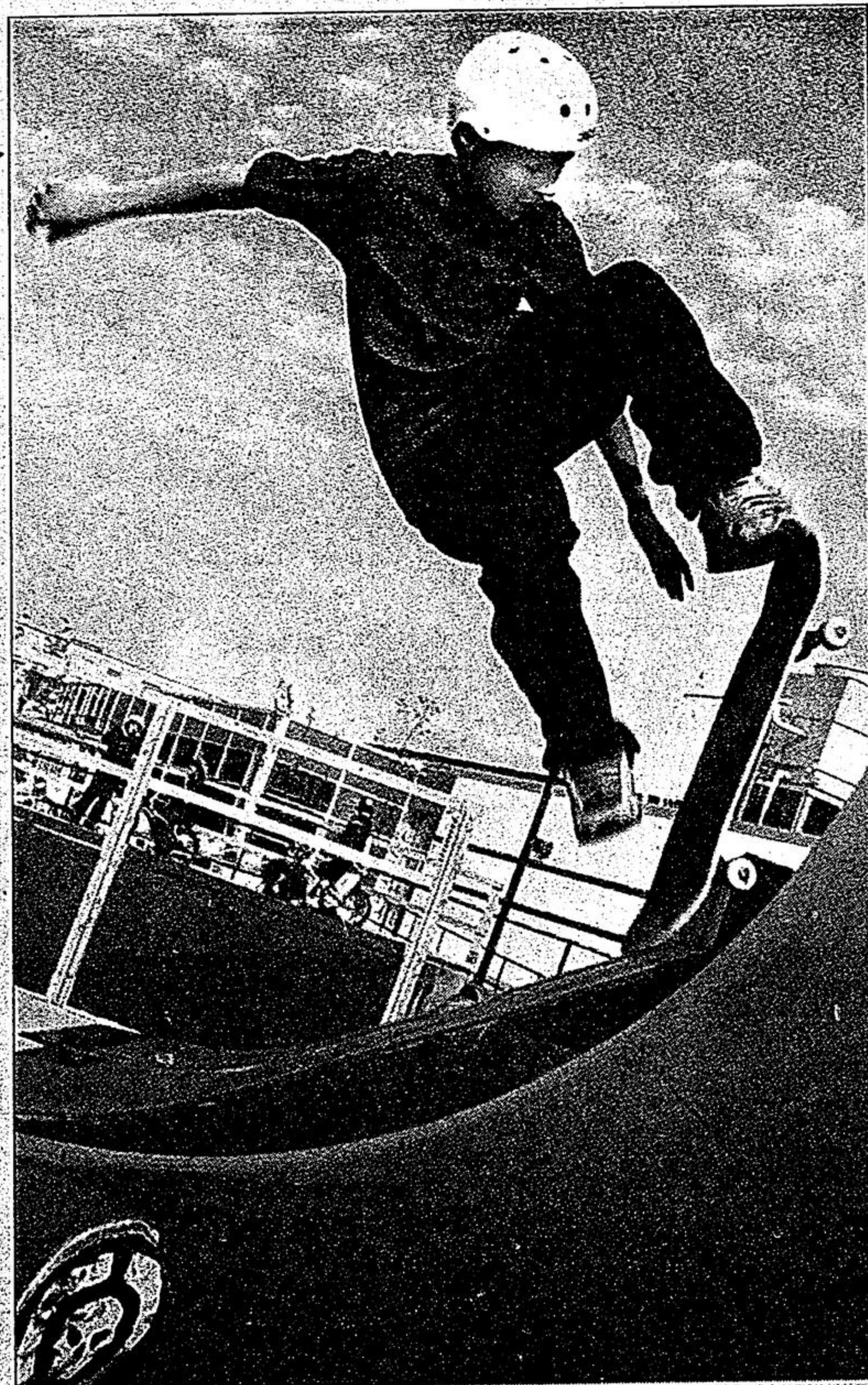
But hey, dude, how are you gonna stop 'em once they've made up their minds?

The skateboarding craze is in full flight, no matter if the venue is a sidewalk or custom-made facility, such as the Evolution Skatepark that opened for business last summer at the Vaughan Sports Village.

Find a smooth surface, throw in objects around which to ride, jump and perform tricks and there is potential for skateboarders. Heck, give a kid a stairwell and he's in business.

It is the X-Generation's contribution to sport, derived from ventures into other so-called extreme sports. Very individual. Un-mainline. Non-confrontational, yet competitive as kids invent and copy each other's moves and make up their own. All with a very evident West Coast strut.

Vert skating, a form of skating similar to Olympic-style snowboarding, is starting to get hot again. Big in the 1980s, its biggest roadblock is space, though that's no problem at the 20,000-square-foot complex in Vaughan, where the centrepiece is an 11-1/2-foot half-pipe guaranteed to make the



FILE PHOTO

The Evolution Skatepark in Vaughan is a mecca for skateboarders. Stouffville has its own park and Markham is planning one.

blood rush to any boarder's head. (Psst. Don't tell the kids, but parents think the supervised facility is cool because of a mandatory helmet policy.)

Actually, the Vaughan facility

differs from typical skateparks in that its wood construction can be easily altered to create variety from year to year and meet shifting interests in the sport. Most parks are concrete monsters whose next

step in life seems likely to be a wrecking ball, should the craze fade.

"Vert is a little more scary," said Christian Scenna, part of a group vying to bring a permanent year-round skateboard park to Newmarket. "You have a 12-foot pipe and five feet of air (underneath) and that can be intimidating."

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To the uninitiated, it might seem like splitting hairs, but those in the know are quick to acknowledge there is a difference between the two modes.

"For some reason, kids are more willing to throw themselves down a flight of stairs," acknowledged Brian Stier, manager of West 49, a retail franchise at Upper Canada Mall catering to the clothing and equipment needs of skateboarders. "To me, a half-pipe is intimidating."

The comparisons between skateboarding and snowboarding, one of the hottest things on hills these days, are obvious.

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Kathleen Griffin

Been There, Done That

Cute pro, nice day, golf can't be too bad

Right off the bat, I'll confess I've never really liked golf.

I've always believed Mark Twain's adage the game is a good way to ruin a nice walk. Maybe it's because I could never get away from my hockey shot; no matter how I swung the club, the ball invariably went straight along the ground, to the guffaws of friends and family.

Besides the occasional game of mini-golf with my son, I haven't touched a club in years. Until last week. That's when I took a lesson from CPGA pro David Spylo at the beautiful Angus Glen Golf Club in Unionville.

Nice course. Cute pro. It couldn't be that bad.

And it wasn't. In fact, golf is one of the few sports most anybody can play and play for life. You don't have to be an athlete — you don't even have to be in good shape (lucky for me).

"It's a lifetime sport for all shapes, sizes and ages," Mr. Spylo said. "Some people think it can be stuffy, but it's really just a classy environment. It's not about competitiveness, it's more

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