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Milliken High the face of multiculturalism

BY HANNELORE VOLPE
Staff Writer

The multicultural face of Canada is evident at Milliken Mills High School.

Although the students represent about 45 countries and speak more than 30 languages — including Urdu, Tagalog, Hungarian, Greek and Punjabi — the halls resound mainly with English.

About one-third of the school's 1,775 students are enrolled in the school's English as a Second Language program taught by four full-time and two part-time teachers.

"They really try to learn their skills in English," said principal Kadri Mereweather. The ESL course also familiarizes immigrants with local customs. More than 100 immigrants have come to the school during the past year alone.

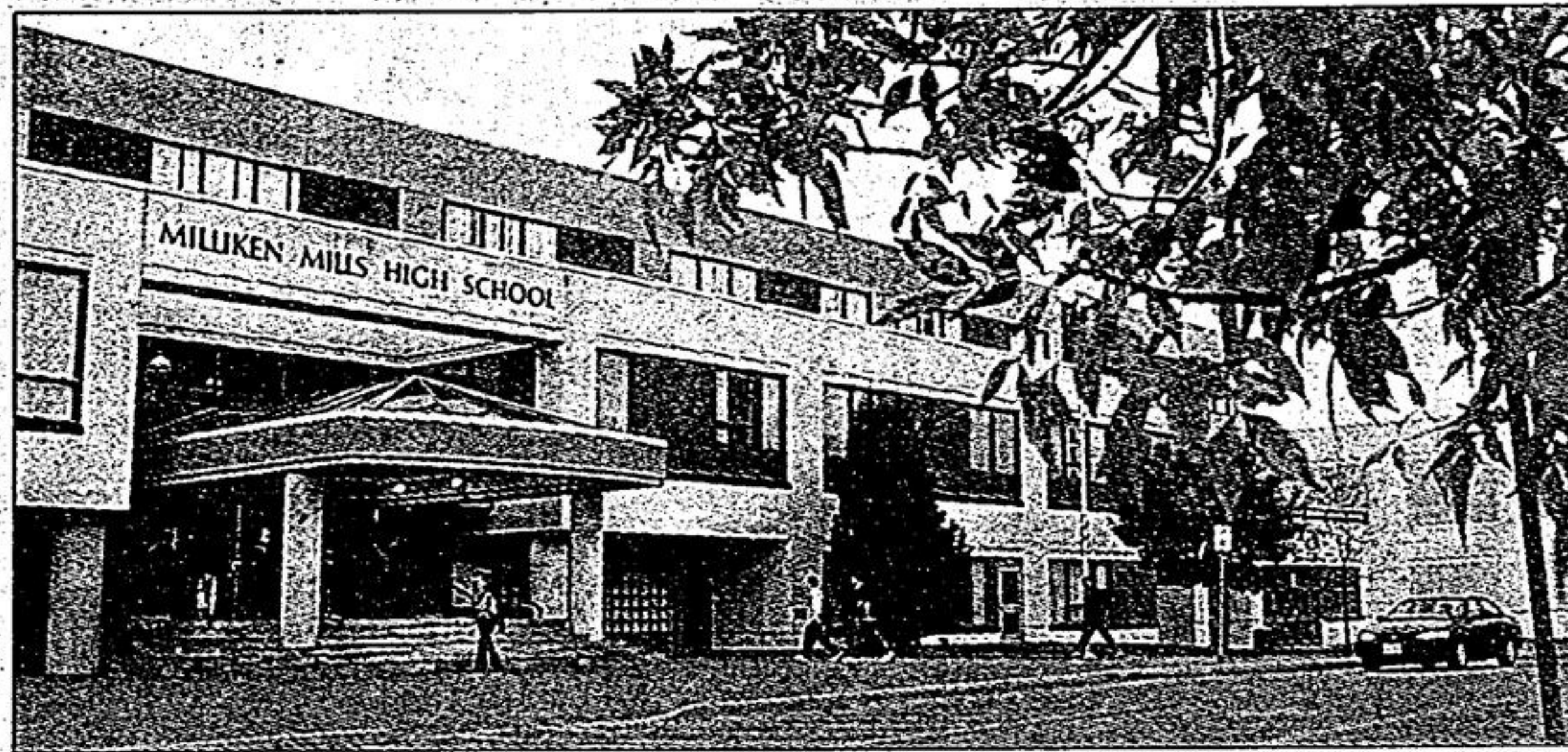
When the school greeted its first students in 1988, there was already a large diversity of ethnic backgrounds and religions.

Since then, the facility has grown so much that an addition with 12 classrooms was recently completely. However, six portables are still in use.

The wonderful range of backgrounds is reflected in the various student groups, such as the Youth of South Asia, the Sri Lankan Tamil Group, the Chinese Christian Fellowship, the Nubian Excellence Club and the Muslim Students' Association.

Because so many of the students have roots in countries that have endured wars and atrocities, there is a strong Amnesty International chapter at the school.

"There is a very high level of respect for others because of their community," noted Ms Mereweather. Many of the students have been in the community with their friends of various backgrounds since elementary school.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Milliken Mills High School, on Kennedy Road, has 1,775 students.

MILLIKEN MILLS HIGH SCHOOL,
 7522 KENNEDY RD.,
 UNIONVILLE, ONT. L3R 9S5.
 PHONE: 905-477-0072
 EMAIL: WWW.MMHS.CA
 PRINCIPAL: KADRI MEREWATHER
 VICE-PRINCIPALS: CINDY RANIERI
 DR. IVY CHAN, DAVID McADAM
 SCHOOL COUNCIL CHAIR: ELIZABETH CAMPBELL

"It is just natural to get along," she said. "The kids are supportive, respectful and caring. I wouldn't leave it."

During the school's multicultural week held every May, student groups feature their culture's music, dancing and food.

"We are trying to hire teachers that reflect our student population," Ms Mereweather explained. A significant number of the 120 instructors do, in fact, reflect the heritage of their pupils.

Milliken High has pride in its sports programs. "People want to come here because of the basketball program," the principal said. Every year, two or three students, such as Corey Muirhead and Arnel Scott, head off to university in the U.S. on basketball scholarships.

The senior boys' basketball team finished second in York Region this year and fourth in the provincial playdowns.

A good example of the kind of athlete produced at Milliken High is OAC student Seiji Ishiguro, the 2002 Athlete of the Year.

As well as excelling in wrestling and judo, he helped coach the girls' volleyball team and boys' rugby team. Mr.

Ishiguro won the MVP for three sports, earned a bronze medal at the provincial wrestling finals and a gold medal in the Ontario judo championships.

Last year's valedictorian, Christopher Samuel, came away with three scholarships for his university education: the Millennium Award, the Miles Thompson Award and Vedic Award.

About one-third of MMHS graduates were Ontario scholars, earning an average of at least 80 per cent. Of the 253 people who applied to university last semester, 71 per cent were accepted at the university they preferred.

There are seven developmentally or physically challenged youths at the school and many students volunteer to help them. There are also programs, such as TEAM, for at-risk students who can't fit into the regular curriculum. The program head of TEAM, Chris Williams, oversees about 10 students, mostly 15 and 16-year-olds who learn academics and outdoor education.

They'll work with the Town of Markham, or L'Arche Daybreak, for example. The MMHS co-op program has about 200 participants, working at banks, hospitals and offices to gain practical experience.

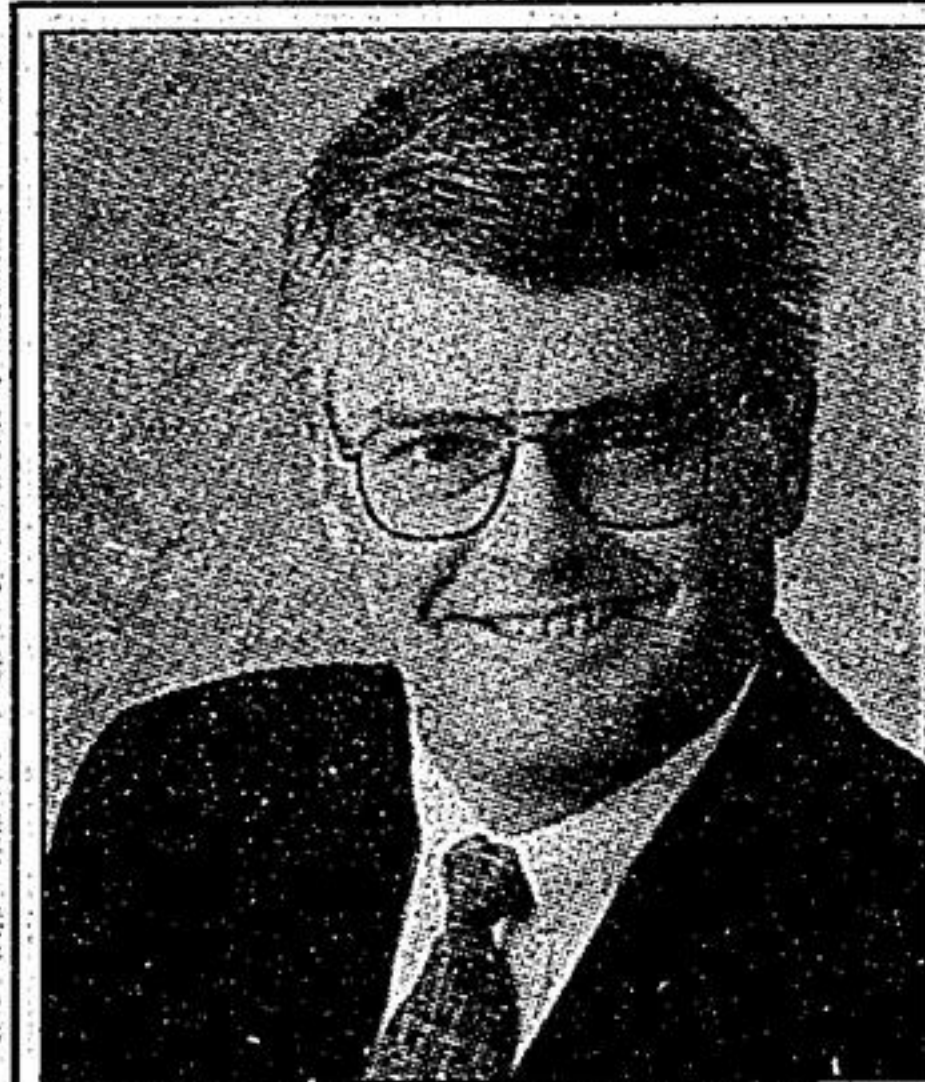
The school has an active music program, including choir, junior and senior bands and symphonic band, which offers activities throughout the year.

The school council has been chaired by Elizabeth Campbell for the past two years. The council is looking at improving access to the school and increasing traffic safety through construction of a second driveway.



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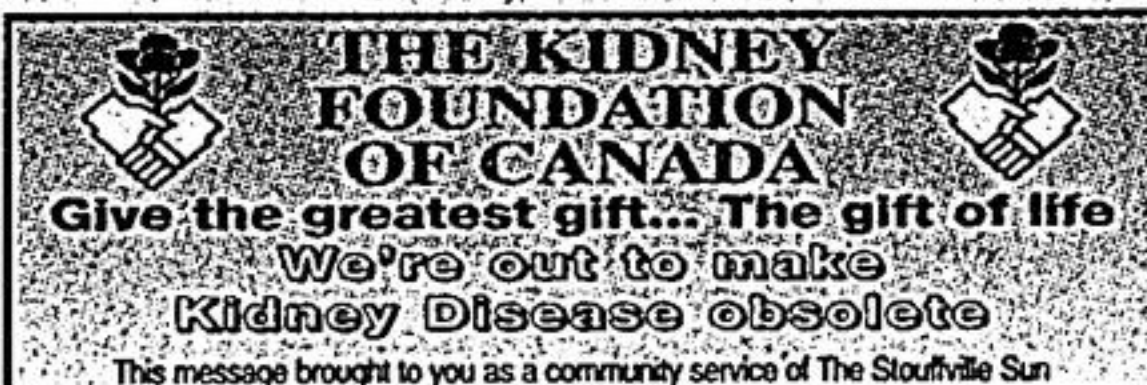
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One year less to decide future

From page 23.

Another problem is caused by simply not knowing what to choose.

"It's hard enough for teenagers to decide what they want to do with their lives; now we have to decide when we are a year younger," said Melissa Palermo of Markville Secondary School.

Walking into the final years of high school with no real idea about the future can be frightening. Most students haven't had a chance to gain the experience needed to make such decisions.

That said, once a decision is made, a second problem arises. With two grade levels graduating in one year, an extraordinary number of students is attempting to enter universities and colleges.

"The double cohort has put me under a lot of pressure," said Christina Luison, a grade 12 student at Brother Andre Catholic High School.

Andrew Lambert is a student at Brother Andre Catholic High School in Markham.