

# UNIONVILLE

News and Features

## Mark II Public School

### New era in student education

By Mark Niblett  
UNIONVILLE - Kids aren't what they used to be.

This is a common statement. In some ways, it's misleading: little girls still play with dolls, as their mothers did; little boys still enjoy sports, as their fathers did.

But there have been some genuine changes in children over the last few years. Even public school children today are aware of such things as ecology, political activism, and the drug cult.

Unionville's newest school, Mark II, shows that educators appreciate the changes in students and in society. The "open-school" concept, as applied at Mark II, is a recognition that we can't forever remain in the little-red-schoolhouse era of education.

Larry Dobson, principal of Mark II, is enthusiastic about the open-school system. Students there are in the 11 to 13 age group - what used to be called Grades 7 and 8 - and the whole school is designed around them, their needs and desires.

The school is in its third year of operation. Mr. Dobson remembers that things were pretty chaotic at first, with a half-finished building to work in. In addition, none of the staff had any experience with open-plan schools.

"We just got pitched in here and told to go ahead," Mr. Dobson said, "none of us knew a thing about it."

There are no grades as such at Mark II; instead, each student progresses at his own rate. Report cards - which are going out this week - don't show marks. Instead of "English 86 percent," the card might read, "English - Johnny has a good grasp of verbal skills. His vocabulary is adequate. In spelling



Thirteen year old Barbara Bartlett, Lee Avenue, Milliken, utilizes the modern facilities in the Home Economics room at Mark II School. —Jas. Thomas

and the use of work skills, he has shown consistently outstanding ability."

The report card also explains the goals of the school. Of the three listed, Mr. Dobson feels the most important is "to encourage students to accept a greater degree of responsibility for their own education."

"The thing we teach best is social skills," Mr. Dobson observed.

He admits that there has been some resistance to the school.

"I've had parents complaining even when their child is doing very well," he said, "they don't believe us when we tell them how a student is doing."

He also admits that some students have considerable difficulty in coping with Mark II's system.

"There are always

Twelve year old Darlene Lewis of Cashel practices the art of ironing. —Jas. Thomas.

system". Students are divided into four houses and the "house areas" are on the upper floor. These are open-space rooms where students are taught some basics. On the ground floor are the more practical rooms: a woodworking shop, a gymnasium, and so on. Timetables are arranged so that students will spend part of each day in classrooms, as well as in their house areas.

The school is run, like many others, on a 6-day system. Day 6 provides time for the students to take elective courses. These include a chess club, a newspaper club (which publishes a newsletter), gourmet cooking, and a psychology club.

Students seem to react well to the atmosphere at Mark II. One young lady, asked her opinion, declared with all the wisdom of a 12-year-old, "It's a revolutionary concept in educational philosophy".

Asked whether she likes the school, she looked scornful. "Well of course I like it," she said, "who shouldn't? They treat us like we were people here!"

Her favorable opinion of Mark II is shared by the teachers as well. One of them, Joe Marinangeli, has been teaching at the school since it opened. "It's a great way to do things," he said, "the kids learn well!"

Mark II may well be the wave of the future in education. The old brick schoolhouses were fine places in their day - but that day is gone. An increasing number of open schools are appearing, not only in York but in other areas as well. A time may be at hand when a student will go through the entire educational process at his own pace - whether it takes him 8, 12 or 15 years to complete the high-school level.

It's still too early to accurately judge the results; the system is obviously here to stay.

### Arena status unchanged

UNIONVILLE - Crosby Memorial Centre and Crosby Memorial Arena were confirmed as Community Centres by Markham Council, Nov. 23 - but not without some doubts being expressed.

A bylaw was introduced by councillor Murray Henderson to confirm existing Community Centres and add several more. Such centres are recognized in provincial legislation, and are eligible for financial support.

"I want to see Crosby Memorial Arena left out of this bylaw until more investigation is done", said councillor Henderson. He felt the financial standing of the Arena needed closer examination.

Mayor Tony Roman pointed out that the Arena has been established as a Community Centre "for some time" and added, "There's never been any problem".

Clerk Harry Crisp explained that the new bylaw would not, in fact, change the status of the Arena since a



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