

Pickle ball's growth included in track project

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What do you get when you cross badminton and ping pong with a whiffle ball?

Pickle ball of course.

Never heard of it? You're not alone, but you might be in the near future.

There are close to 150 people ready to form an official Whitchurch-Stouffville pickle ball club, according to avid pickle baller Dennis Carter. And that is only after a month of canvassing players who drop into the Stouffville Arena once a week for pick-up games.

"The numbers really look good. ... I was quite surprised," Mr. Carter said.

Right now, the only lined court for local pickle ball is on Pad B of the Stouffville Arena. However, as part of rehabilitating its three tennis courts and adding a fourth one, town staff will paint pickle ball lines on one of them as well as install sleeves for four pickle ball nets for dual use, according to a council report.

Town staff have also agreed to allow pickle ballers to play on the outdoor rink in Vandorf. However, there are no plans to paint any playing surface lines on the pad, according to Maria Schembri, spokesperson for the town, who added she encourages the group to grow as a club so established courts can be created.

"There's nothing allocated in the budget for it (in 2013). ... We are doing what we can to accommodate their needs right now," she said.

Pickle ball was in-demand a few years ago.

The town accommodated the players by painting court lines on Stouffville Arena's B pad. But after one summer session of play, the pad did not see any other pickle ball action until this year, according to a recent report.

The sport is back and more popular than ever.

"It's a very addictive sport," Mr. Carter said.

Pickle ball was created in 1965 by American congressmen Joel Pritchard, William Bell and Barney McCallum, who all came home from a round of golf one day to find their children bored. The fathers set out to create a game to keep them busy throughout the summer, according to pickleball.com

The men handed the children ping-pong paddles and a whiffle ball, then lowered the net on their badminton court.

Soon people were lowering their badminton court nets and making their own pickle ball paddles. Rules were eventually created and in 1972 pickle ball was officially incorporated. Today, the game is played around the world.

The tennis courts are not the only playing surfaces to get a face-lift this year. So too will the Connell-Franklin Track by the Stouffville Arena.

The courts and track were constructed about 20 years ago and have not had any major improvements made to them since then and "have now reached the end of their life cycle", according to a recent council report.

In order to make room for the fourth tennis court, the long jump pit will be moved between the soccer pitches and tennis courts, adjacent the pathway, according to Ms Schembri.

The project has a budget of \$749,750. About half (\$371,250) of it will be funded through

the Community Infrastructure Improvement Fund grant the municipality received last December.

The work is expected to start today and be completed in early October.

For more information on pickle ball, contact Dennis Carter at 647-977-2373.

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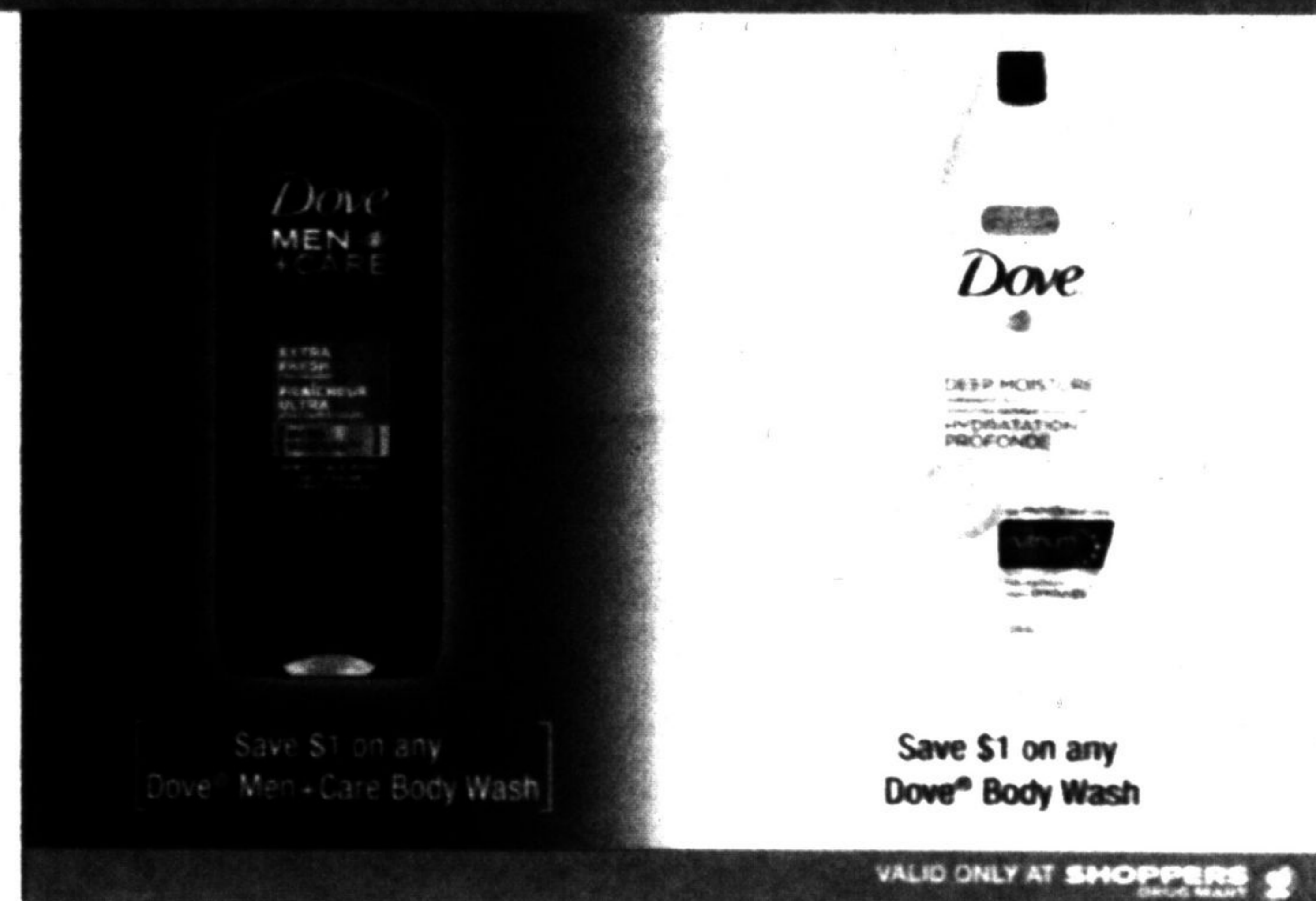
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