



CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE

FEBRUARY EVENTS

RESERVATIONS:
(905)642-4227

Wednesday, 6th February
**AFTER HOURS
NETWORKING
BOSTON PIZZA**
Time: 5:00pm - 7:30pm
Members: Free
Non-members: \$10

Thursday, 7th February
AFTER HOURS EVENT
Stouffville Spirit vs.
Pickering
Stouffville Arena
Ninth Line
Time: 7:30pm - 10pm
Members: Free
Members only event

Wednesday, 13th February
**STOUFFVILLE LIBRARY
SEMINAR**
"Market Research"
Stouffville Council
Chambers
Time: 8:30am

Wednesday, 20th February
LUNCHEON
Kathleen
Llewellyn-Thomas, P. Eng.
Commissioner of
Transportation
and Community Planning
Region of York
STATION CREEK
GOLF CLUB
12657 Woodbine Avenue
Time: 12 Noon - 2pm
Members: \$30
Non-Members: \$40

Friday, 8th March
**INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S DAY
LUNCHEON**
Invited Speaker: Hon.
Ruth Ann Onley
Meadowbrook Golf Club
11939 Warden Avenue
Time: 12 Noon - 2pm
Members: \$40
Non-Members: \$50
Net proceeds to
women's charities
Media Sponsor



Barking Up The Right Tree

Business venture helps young entrepreneurs

By Kinjal Dagli Shah

Nicholas Small is a 20-year-old who didn't much enjoy interacting with other people. That is, until he learnt the art of making and selling soap bars last year.

Diagnosed at birth with Costello's Syndrome, a rare genetic disorder, Nicholas was a shy teenager who kept to himself. But that soon changed. "Over Christmas, I noticed a sea change," said Nicholas's mother, Pat, beaming with pride.

"A friend of mine had placed an order for some soap and we took it over to her house. Nicholas insisted that I sit in the car while he delivered the goods. He rang the doorbell, greeted my friend, took the soaps out of the bag and made her examine them, asking if they were satisfactory. When asked how much he was owed, he told her, collected the correct amount, and wished her a Merry Christmas before leaving. That's a big turnaround for Nicholas."

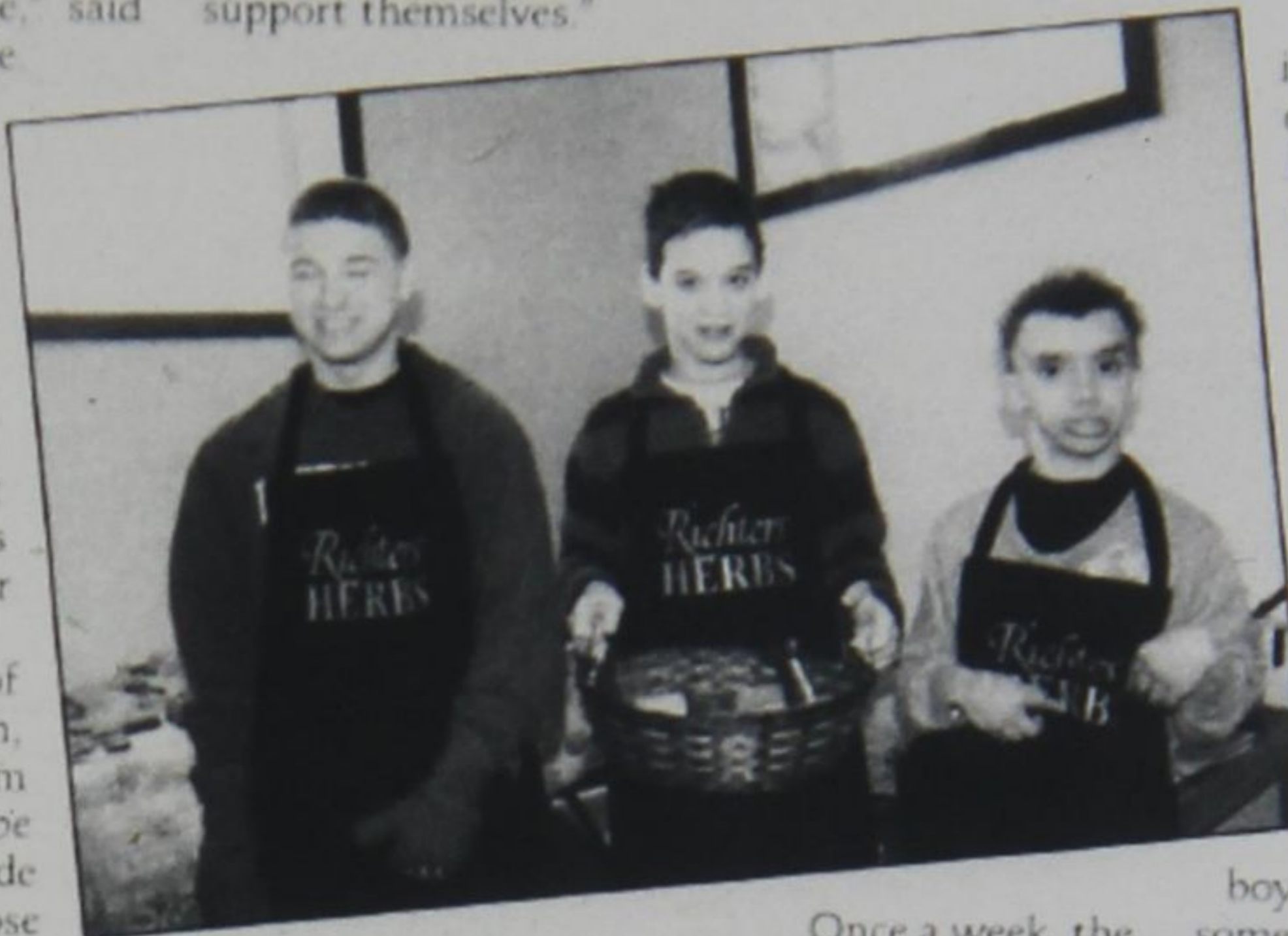
Somewhere in Toronto, the parents of 15-year-olds Alan Graham and Ben Lipson, who have both been diagnosed with autism and who work with Nicholas, must be beaming as well. Their venture was made possible by Stouffville's Laura Hunter, whose Real Life program helped the boys launch their own company, The Barking Dog.

"We started it as a pilot project to teach these young adults how to start their own business and give them a sense of ownership," said Laura, a powerhouse of energy and motivation. She has been running the Laura Hunter's STEPS programs for special needs children for 33 years.

"My clients stay with me for a long time, going through different programs. I've known these boys since they were toddlers and I know that there isn't a lot of opportunity for them once they

finish school. They typically attend adult day programs and their parents have to continue to pay for it," explained Laura.

"Besides, these programs have long waiting lists and the families end up waiting for years. The idea behind the Barking Dog Company is to teach them not just entrepreneurial skills but life skills as well. It aims to ease the financial burden on the parents and to give the boys an opportunity to support themselves."



Once a week, the three young businessmen get together at Laura's farm property in Stouffville and spend the day making, wrapping and learning to market their soap bars.

"It's very therapeutic, and a lot of fun. Somebody mentioned that making soap isn't a complicated process, so we did a trial. It's something the boys have learnt to make independently. Besides, it looks beautiful and unique," said Laura. Customers obviously agree and the business is slowly but surely expanding.

"We're already selling soap at Schell Lumber in

Stouffville, Richters Herbs in Goodwood and at a dog training facility up in Mount Albert," she said.

"My boys sold \$800 worth of soap at Christmas time. We did Christmas scene and snowmen soaps, gardener soaps, and even soap for dogs in the shape of a bone. Every bar is handmade and completely natural, free of chemicals. People are even requesting it now and placing custom orders."

The only thing preventing further expansion is lack of manpower, added Laura. "I'm a little overwhelmed right now and need a little help. I'm looking for volunteers who could help with wrapping or marketing."

The company name was inspired by Laura's Australian shepherd, Annie. The boys were initially terrified of all dogs, so she instigated a dog training program to help them overcome their fear. "They now love Annie and are no longer afraid of dogs."

In fact, she said, they are training new canine recruits for the program. "Because Annie is so important to them - and she likes to bark as all Australian shepherds do - we decided to name the company after her."

The profits from Barking Dog go to the boys, but not before they learn how to invest some of the money back into buying materials and accounting for the hours put into making the product. It's done them a world of good, as is evident from the parents' comments about how they have noticed marked improvements in their sons' social skills, as well as in their self-confidence.

"They are so proud of the accomplishment that they have gone back to their schools and talked about it in class. They even have their own business cards," said Laura. For parents like Pat, the project is a godsend.

"My son is a big celebrity in his school. He's more assured of his own personality because he can do something the other kids don't know how to do. We're really pleased with Laura because she believes in the kids and makes them believe in themselves. This project just proves that somewhere along the line, my son could become a contributing part of the community and not get pushed off into a home."

It's amazing what a few bars of soap can do.

Have something to say? Send your feedback about the story to kinjal.dagli@gmail.com



Nicholas at work producing soap at Laura Hunter's Stouffville farmhouse.

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