Writing competition hits halfway point

Alison Clack
The Brunswickan

NaNoWriMo is not the latest iPod variety.

The odd abbreviation stands for National Novel Writing Month, a writing contest that was created 10 years ago. The competition was the brain-child of Chris Baty, a freelance writer.

The goal of the competition is to write a novel of at least 50,000 words (roughly 175 pages) in one month. This year's contest started on Nov. 1 and ends on Nov. 30 at midnight.

In its first year the contest was held only in the San Francisco Bay area. Twenty-one people participated in the competition which took place throughout the month of July.

Over the years the competition grew and the founders created the non-profit group, The Office of Letters and Light. The group now oversees the project in addition to a handful of other events that encourage creativity in children and adults.

Internationally the NaNoWriMo competition has over 100,000 participants this year. Provincially, there are approximately 100 participants. A little closer to home, in Saint John, there are about 10 people participating in this contest.

The person responsible for keeping potential novelists on track is the municipal liaison. In Saint John, the municipal liaison is NaNoWriMo veteran, Victoria Bridges.

"It was probably about five or six years ago now," says Bridges about when she first heard of the competition, "I heard about it from one of my friends on LiveJournal who had mentioned it. It was too late for me to sign up at the time but I decided I would do it the year after."

Since then Bridges has done it every year, writing stories with numerous topics.

"One [story] was, and I'll be perfectly blunt, *Little House on the Prairie* fan fiction. Last year I wrote a personal reflection on what could have happened in my life if it had gone a different way. This year I'm doing vampire crime fighting," says Bridges.

Despite the tight time limit on the competition Bridges says she has never felt too much pressure.

"[The stress level was] not really high, at least for me personally. I usually find enough time in the day to write a couple of thousand words. Most people tend to laugh more about it than really feel the crunch," says Bridges.

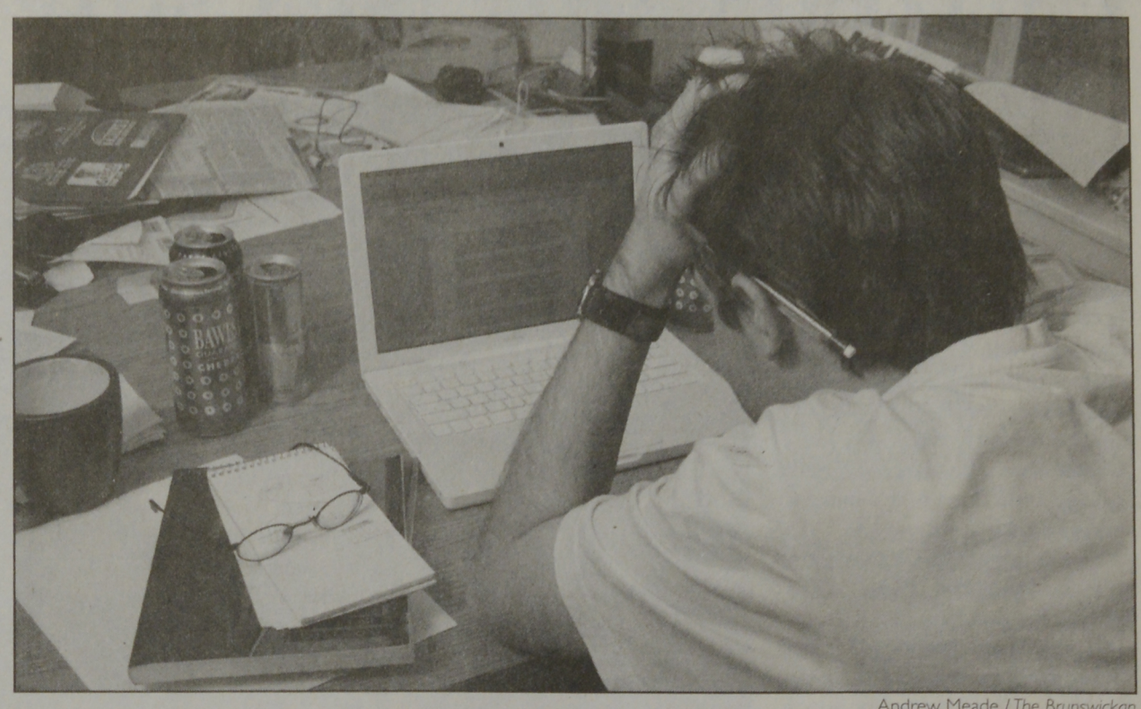
"Bridges also dispenses some advice on reaching the competition's goal: "It seems stressful at first but when you break it down into daily goals it gets a lot less hefty."

One of Bridges' responsibilities as the municipal liaison is to motivate the local writers. To promote creativity and inspiration she organizes meetings regularly.

"The municipal liaisons tend to organize meet-ups maybe once every week or every two weeks through out the month. These are sort of a check-in; we go get a coffee or something and maybe just relax and have fun; we sort of detox a bit," says Bridges.

To help the perspective novelists with their writing, Bridges organizes games that promote creativity.

"[The game] is a little bit difficult to describe; my friend taught it to me. Basically one person writes a sentence on a piece of paper, the next person at the table draws and the person after that writes down what they see. We just go around like that and see how messed up it ends up being; it's kind of like Chinese telephone," says Bridges.



Andrew Meade / *The Brunswickan*

Participants in NaNoWriMo have only one month to come up with a full-length novel of approximately 50,000 words. NaNoWriMo runs internationally each year.

Some critics have argued that NaNoWriMo promotes quantity versus quality; however, Bridges says that is not necessarily true.

"From what I have seen most people, on their first attempt, try and see if they can do it. Usually if they try and do [the competition] again after that they try and writing something a bit better; they try and improve on what they did before," says Bridges.

Bridges believes that the competition acts as a motivation for those who would not find the time to write a novel otherwise.

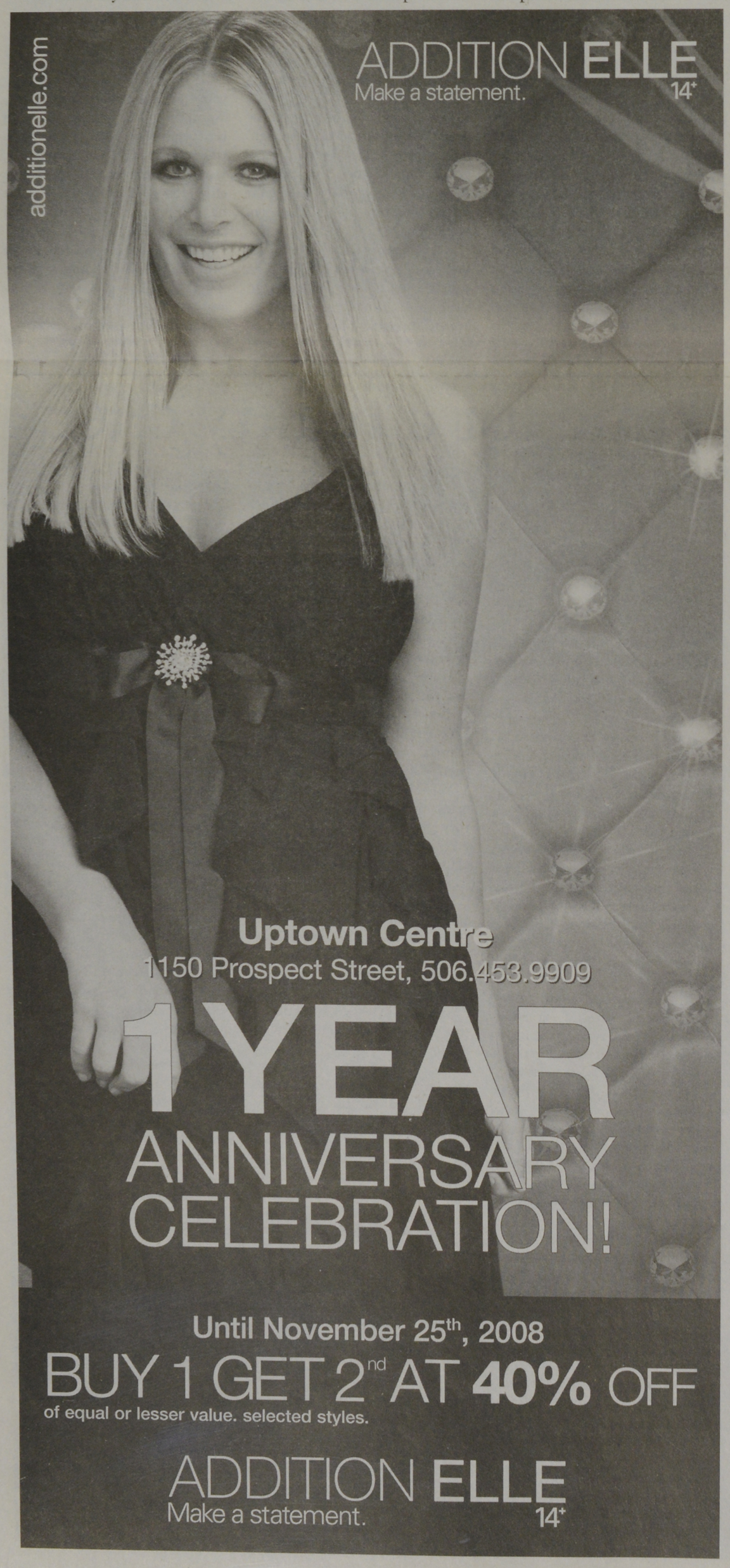
"I think the deadline helps a lot of people. Give people a goal and a deadline and people tend to be a lot more willing to push themselves than just 'someday I'll write a novel,'" says Bridges, "[Competition] is definitely a driving thing. Not unhealthy competition but a little bit of friendly competition: maybe having word count wars and trying to get ahead of the next person."

Over the course of the competition 24 writers have had their work published. One of these writers, Sara Gruen, had a New York Times Bestseller with a novel she wrote during the competition, *Water for Elephants.*

Achievements like this are exactly what the competition is about. NaNoWriMo is a competition about potential; the creators recognized the potential or the average person to be able to create something interesting. The deadline simply serves to motivate people who would not write otherwise.

Anyone looking to sign up for NaNoWriMo next year can visit their website, *http://www.nanowrimo.org.*

get involved with the bruns! story/photo meetings are wednesdays at 12:30 p.m. in SUB room 35.



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