

Leaving the institution meant more freedom

By **VALERIE MCLAUGHLIN**

Staff Writer

Larry Markus has a keen eye for bargains.

His house is filled with electronic gadgets that he has bought at yard sales and items he has found discarded on curbsides for garbage collection.

After finding an abandon computer on a sidewalk he immediately took it home and fixed it. It now sits in his living room with his other assorted electronic equipment, including a working eight-track. He purchased a fax machine for the bargain basement price of \$1, he proudly boasts.

Larry lives an independent life with his grey tabby cat, Peanut, in a two-storey white house that he rents from his parents.

He spends his days toiling in his back shed, fixing electronic items, maintaining his property and fishing when he can. He has his own special fishing hole and is unwilling to disclose its location. Perhaps if it wasn't for Rideau Regional Centre, Larry may not be the person he is today, wonders his mother, Theresa Markus.

"I don't know what would have happened if he hadn't went there," said Mrs. Markus.

Larry was 13 when he went to Rideau Regional in September 1971.

A hyperactive child with intellectual disabilities, Larry was unable to cope in a school setting in Pembroke. A doctor suggested to Mrs. Markus and her husband Martin that they consider admitting their son to Rideau Regional.

"Larry couldn't read or write before he went to Smiths Falls," said Mrs. Markus. "But when he came back he could read and write. Actually, Larry did okay at Smiths Falls."

"Smiths Falls was a good place for people who needed help. Some parents couldn't

cope," said Mr. Markus.

Larry returned home on weekends and during holidays, and the couple visited their son in Smiths Falls often and attended every parents' day. Parent days were difficult days in many respects, explained Mrs. Markus. She recalled seeing children believing their absentee parents would show up, waiting in vain. It was emotionally draining for her.

"There were sad situations down there," recalled Mr. Markus. "Some parents dumped their children down there.

"It broke your heart," added Mrs. Markus. "You just wanted to gather them up. It is something I'll never forget."

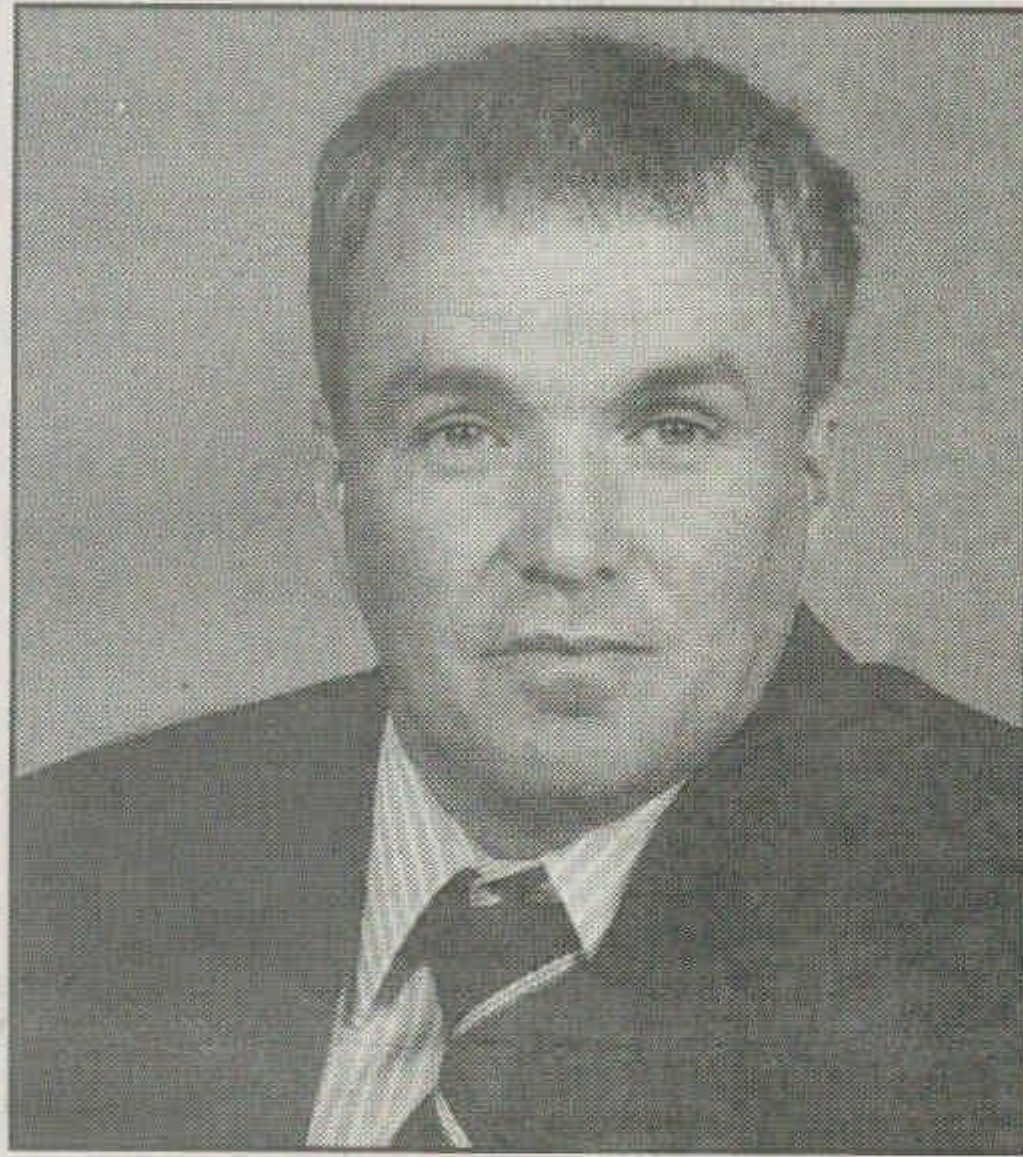
Larry spent eight years at the Smiths Falls institution before he was discharged in 1979 and released back into "freedom" as he describes it.

"I had my freedom. I could do whatever I want," he explained. "I was glad to get out because no one could

tell me what to do. I could do whatever I want, but I can't do whatever I want all of the time. There are rules to follow, but rules can be broken," he said, with a mischievous glint in his eye.

Despite burning his face, arms and hands badly in an accident five years ago, Larry has been living life to the fullest. He and his father recently returned from vacationing in Nashville. Believing Rideau Regional helped their son immensely, the couple says the centre's residents, especially its most vulnerable, must continued to be provided with the support and care they require, say Larry's parents.

"I would hate to see those people without any support of any kind," said Mrs. Markus.



LARRY MARKUS