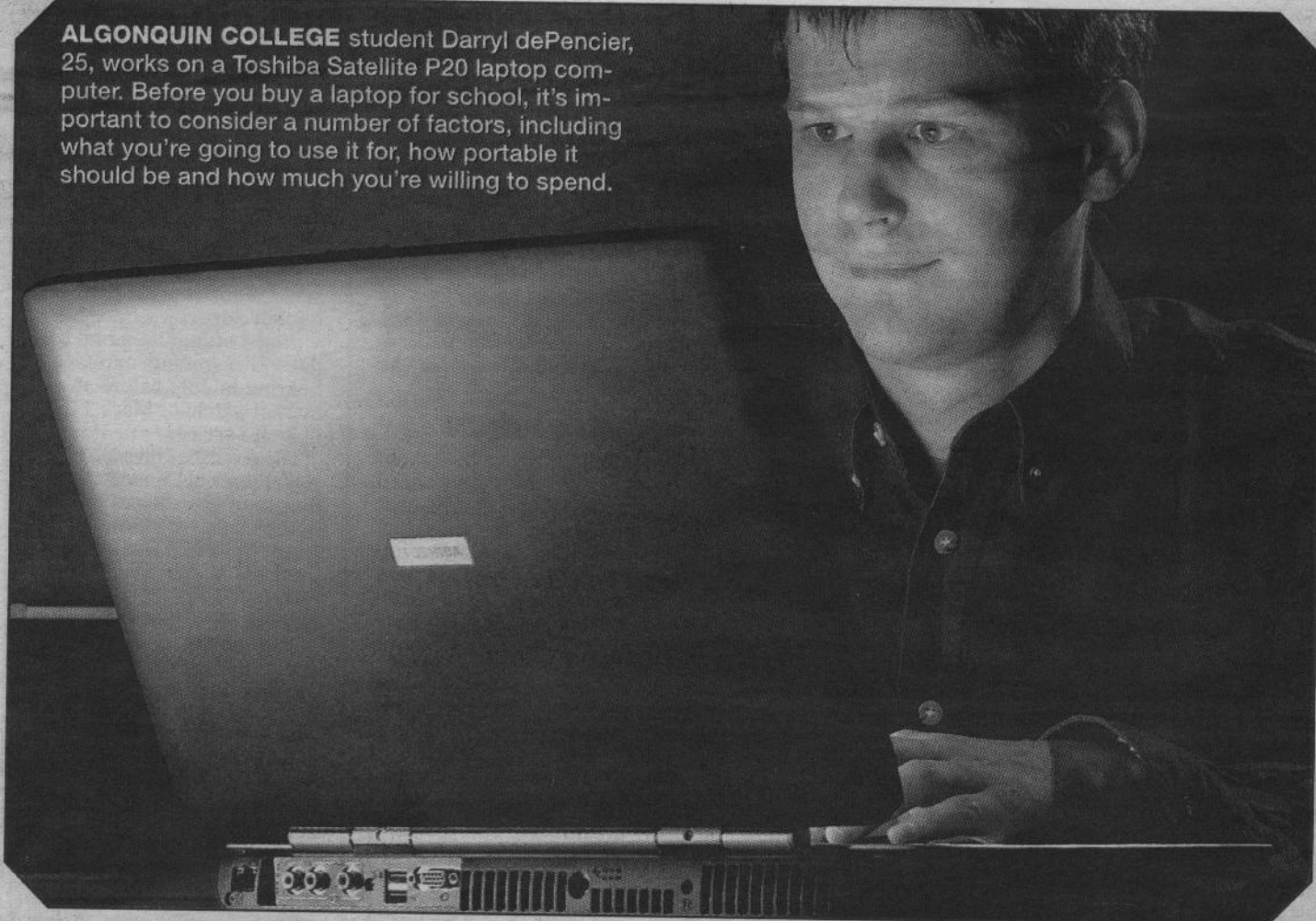


**ALGONQUIN COLLEGE** student Darryl dePencier, 25, works on a Toshiba Satellite P20 laptop computer. Before you buy a laptop for school, it's important to consider a number of factors, including what you're going to use it for, how portable it should be and how much you're willing to spend.



Sean Kilpatrick SUN

# Getting schooled on laptops

By ROSALYN STEVENS

**PAPER, pens, pencils, binders ... laptops?**

Laptop computers have become a regular part of back-to-school shopping for many students. But knowing what's the best and what's really needed can be tough with so many options.

While getting ready to return to school is probably the last thing on your mind, it's never too early to start doing your homework. Here are a few tips for that inevitable trip to the computer store.

■ **USAGE:** Decide what the computer will really be used for. Sure, it's for school, but do you plan on playing video games on it during study breaks? Or is it simply going to be used for word processing and light Internet surfing? These factors play big



when deciding what features to look for in a laptop.

■ **PORTABILITY:** Seems redundant when you're looking at laptop computers, but some are more portable than others. Will the computer be dragged across campus day after day? Or is it just a desktop substitute for home use? Some laptops with added features, like DVD burners or larger screens, weigh a lot more and could cause a student unnecessary grief trying to lug around day after day.

■ **MONEY:** Something all students run short on, money is a big factor in shopping for a laptop. In general, you won't get one for less than \$1,500. Here's

the breakdown of a computer we looked at in this price range.

■ **PROCESSOR:** 2.8 gigahertz. For word processing and Internet use, this will do fine. But if you're looking for gaming ability, a faster processor will be needed.

■ **OPERATING SYSTEM:** Windows XP home. Some models are coming out with Windows XP Pro, but according to Shawn Davies, manager of the New Technology Store at Algonquin College, XP home is fine for just about everyone.

■ **MEMORY:** 256 megabytes. "Very shortly, that's going to be changing to 512 (megabytes)," said Davies. But, he added, 256 MB will work well for entry level use.

■ **HARD DRIVE:** 40 gigabytes. This too is about to change, said Davies. "It's moving toward 60," he said.

■ **CD DRIVE:** Most units come with what's called a "combo-drive" — that is, it can burn information onto CDs and play DVD videos. DVD-burning units are also available, but they will knock up the price a fair bit, Davies said.

■ **WIRELESS CAPABILITY:** Standard on many units is an external wireless card. As campuses get more and more technologically advanced, students are now able to access their school network, without wires, from almost anywhere on campus. Internal wireless networking is available too, but that will bring up the cost by a few hundred dollars.

While most basic models range in price from \$1,399 to \$1,799, there are sometimes other options. Davies mentioned an Ottawa-based company that builds the computers locally.