

Asseltines man fire dept. phones on 24-hour basis

by Helen Murray
As the residents of Halton Hills sleep, they do so secure in the knowledge they are well protected from fire by what many feel is one of the best volunteer fire departments in Canada. But for Red and Jean Asseltine, they fall asleep knowing if there is a fire anywhere in Acton, Georgetown or Esqueping, they will be in the middle of the action, while never leaving their living room.

The Asseltines are the fire dispatchers for Halton Hills. Their lives are tied to their living room 24 hours a day, and one of them is always home. A day off work requires two weeks notice so that replacements may be arranged.

In one corner of their apartment on Chapel St. in Georgetown, the Asseltines have a network of telephones and maps. Calls to the emergency fire numbers go through phones in the couple's home. They are ready 24 hours a day to answer the phones, get the pertinent information and dispatch the fire trucks.

In Georgetown, Red says, he gives the location of the fire over the firefighters' pagers, who in turn rush to the fire hall. In Acton, they sound the siren, heard all over town, and also give the location over the pagers.

The Asseltines were surprised to discover that in 1962, they answered the emergency phones 4,398. Not all the calls were for fires. Sometimes it is person wanting advice on their wood stove, or sometimes it is children playing, who don't realize they have called the fire department. But, for their own protection, the dispatchers record every single phone call.

On January 1, when the air raid siren was turned on in Acton and waited for three hours, they answered 41 calls from people wanting it shut off. These calls will go on next year's total.

The best advice the Asseltines can give to someone facing fire in their home is to give their address immediately when they phone the fire department. Then give the telephone number and the name. By giving the address first, Red notes, if the caller is cut off at least he knows where to dispatch the truck to.

One major cause of concern, he says, is newcomers to the area, or visitors in a home. They do not know the lot and concession number, and some do not even know what sideroad or line they are on. A rural route number is not enough, Red stresses.

Some callers are not even sure if they have a fire. He explains they can smell smoke, but can't tell where it's coming from. He cited one case where he dispatched one firefighter, who discovered wires behind an electrical outlet were burning. With the source located, action was taken, preventing what could have been a real disaster.

When in doubt, Red says, call the fire department.

Technology has given the Asseltines a chance to guard businesses and industries.

A space on a fire panel can be rented for much less than the cost of even slight damage in a fire at a business. Fire security systems are installed in 27 businesses, senior citizens homes and factories in Acton and Georgetown, which are hooked into the town's fire panel, also located in Asseltine's apartment.

Heat and smoke sensors trigger the

system which sounds an alarm and lights a red bulb on the fire panel. If the fire light flashes on, the Asseltines dispatch a truck to the appropriate premise. If it is just a fault in the system, the couple will telephone the business, or representative if after hours, and tell them their system is malfunctioning. As a result, these businesses have 24 hour fire protection.

Many other businesses are hooked into private systems. Should an alarm be sounded there, Red said, the security firm they are with will notify the Asseltines.

Some other businesses have pre-recorded message systems. Should the heat sensor go off, the system will automatically telephone the fire department and a recorded message will tell the Asseltines the name of the business and the address where the trucks should be sent.

Anyone interest in hooking into the fire panel, Red says, should contact fire chief Bill Cunningham or deputy chief Bob Hyde. But nothing is mistake proof.

The Asseltines are comfortable in their jobs. They are used to not going for walks together on a warm summer's night, and they are used to sleeping with the living room light on. They are "one of the mob" with both the departments, and in fact, Jean was commended by Chief Cunningham for her actions during the big wind storm in late December. She was home alone and had to handle a barrage of calls. In a letter to her, Cunningham described her "as a vital link between the public and the department."

But for Jean and for Red, it is all in a day's (and night's) work.



Red Asseltine checks the fire panel (top photo) which links many businesses and industries in Halton Hills to the fire department, while his wife Jean answers the fire phone (bottom photo).



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Georgetown/Acton, Wednesday, February 23, 1983

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Region defers housing study

Statistics show only 18 govt.-assisted housing units in N. Halton, all in Acton

Wm. Hampshire — a sheriff from Speyside

by Mac Sprowl
Sheriff of Halton

Sheriff William J.L. Hampshire was born in Fergus, Wellington County in 1872 and came to Speyside at the age of seven months. He was educated at Dufferin School. Sheriff William J.L. Hampshire was a farmer and in 1920 he served as president of Acton Fair.

He sat on council seven years, was deputy reeve two years and in 1923-24 elected reeve of Esqueping Township. He ran in the 1926 federal election as a Liberal being defeated by Dr. R.K. Anderson M.D., Conservative from Milton, 6200-4300 votes.

Mr. Hampshire, an excellent speaker and politician felt that his defeat in 1926 was caused by him being nominated to run in an earlier election as a United Farmer candidate. He stated he thought the farmers had no business running the country. This statement caused him to lose a lot of friends and votes in the 1926 election.

In 1935 he was appointed Sheriff, Local Registrar of the Supreme Court, County Court Clerk, Registrar of the Surrogate Court, a post he held until 1946. He was also Governor of the Halton Jail. There were two murders in his time in office.

He was for 30 years a trustee of Dufferin School Board and also caretaker. Sheriff William Hampshire first attended Boston Presbyterian Church in 1875 when only three years old and became a member in 1888. In 1954 after 25 years he retired as Sunday School Superintendent and teacher of the Bible class. He was superintendent from 1929-1954.

From 1931-1968 he was an elder of Boston Presbyterian Church, a period of 37 years, and was also a trustee from 1932-1968.

Sheriff Hampshire, who never married, died January 11, 1968 at the age of 96 years and is buried in Fairview Cemetery, Acton.



Sheriff William J.L. Hampshire 1872-1968



Lorne Scots "C" Co. Pte. Derrick Murphy after firing the 81mm mortar, Sgt. Don Atherton, the line Corporal, watches carefully at a course at Canadian Forces Training Area Meaford on a recent weekend.



Sgt. Don Atherton looks through the aiming circle used for determining grid bearings.



Pte. Don Loescher and Pte. Deck positioning the mortar for firing.

—Photos by Charlie Payne



Pte. Don Loescher and Pte. Deck of the Lorne Scots sighting in the 81mm mortar.

Regional director of planning Rash Mohammed tried to convince regional committees last week that he needed additional funds on top of \$35,000 from the province to determine the role of the region regarding housing needs. However, the administration and finance committee opted to defer the issue of the housing study until they receive a detailed report from him.

Ann Gabriel, manager of Halton Housing Authority, suggested to committee that they take advantage of a \$35,000 provincial grant to Halton to be used for a housing study.

There was some confusion, as councillors believed the grant was only available if additional money was added to it. Mohammed has asked for an additional \$35,000 bringing the total for the study to \$70,000.

"Like the elderly study and the day care, we want to find out the region's role in housing," Mohammed told councillors, adding the additional \$35,000 will do that.

"What you're saying is that the province wants to spend \$35,000 to tell us something we already know," commented Oakville Mayor Harry Barrett, who suggested the housing study go under the needs program of the new federal provincial job creation plan.

But Gabriel pointed out that the municipal housing statement forms the basis for a municipality's request for funding at both the provincial and federal levels.

"Until a municipal housing statement has been conducted and approved in Halton we are in the unenviable position of not being able to meet the needs of assisted housing in Halton," Gabriel told councillors.

At Tuesday's Health and Social Services committee, Halton Hills councillor Dave Whiting said he thought the money would be better spent building housing.

But Carol Gooding supported Gabriel's request saying that "we need this data in order to substantiate our position with the government."

And Oakville councillor Ann Mulvale said she believed the region had to "play the province's game."

"The province holds the purse strings and this seems the only way to get funds," Mulvale said.

Linda Langston, housing analyst for the Ministry of Housing, said a municipal statement consists of population trends, economic base, market activity and the need for assisted housing.

She would not offer an opinion as to whether an additional \$35,000 is necessary for the statement, saying only that Mohammed believed it to be necessary and that "some municipalities do add to the funds."

At committee, Gabriel related grim statistics about the lack of assisted housing in Halton, especially for needy families in North Halton.

She told councillors that at present, families could wait two years before being placed in government-assisted housing, with many of those on the waiting list eventually giving up.

The waiting list consists of 429 people—half of them families—in Halton.

There are no government-assisted family units in Georgetown, with just 18 in Acton. Oakville has 18, Burlington has 54 and Milton has none. Only a fifth of Halton's assisted housing units are for families.

"The waiting list has grown steadily from 114 in January, 1979, to 230 in 1983," she said, noting that in four years the waiting list has doubled, but no new housing has accommodated the increase.

At least 87 family housing units were needed by January, but she pointed out that this figure was determined by waiting lists.

"But this does not consider the many people we talk to who have given up on assisted housing," she explained.

"If you live in Georgetown or Milton, there aren't any prospects in sight at all," she added.

'Disaster imminent,' Region may hire disaster coordinator

Prompted by the Halton Regional Police Department, the region of Halton may hire a disaster planning coordinator due to the police department's view that a disaster is imminent in Halton.

Administration and finance committee decided to defer the issue of hiring someone until the budget is decided.

"A plane crash in this area is on the cards," Constable Dave Richards told the region's administration and finance committee meeting Wednesday.

Later, Richards said he was not "in jest at all," saying again there was a good chance of a crash in this area.

"I'm not anticipating the crash, but a lot of the aircraft landing in Toronto International circles around this region," he explained, adding that with most crashes occurring during take-off and landing, Halton has a good chance of having a crash. "We'd be caught with our pants down," he said.

In readiness of this potential disaster, Constable Richards presented committee

with a plan for an emergency planning coordinator who would prepare for a disaster.

A major part of this coordinator's job will be with the volunteer services to organize exercises and plans.

Constable Richards explained to committee that each municipality in Ontario is responsible for its own handling of disasters, and others have emergency planning coordinators.

He presented a scenario of a disaster scene where the police control the area and 21 key people organize an investigation team, security, citizen enquiry, media and other things involved in a disaster.

But Mayor Gord Krantz of Milton said committee "should not overreact."

Chief Administration Officer Dennis Perlin strongly supported the initiation of an emergency planning coordinator who would do mock training sessions.

"There was a lot of confusion at the beginning of the Mississauga disaster," he told committee, saying he believed the coordinator's job to be a full-time one.