

More false alarms keep firefighters busy in 1985

1985 was a very active year for the Halton Hills Fire Department, said Fire Chief Bill Cunningham. It was an average year in most respects, except there was a 44 per cent increase in false alarms and a 24 per cent increase in automobile accident calls.

These increases accounted for a rise in the total number of calls from 347 to 398. Many of the false alarm calls were because of the alarm systems being faulty, Chief Cunningham said. Only one false alarm was a prank call. Total damage caused by fire last year was \$753,734 compared to \$463,935 in 1984. However, there were no fatalities in 1985; there were two last year.

The ten major fires in 1985 include: an Acton home worth \$100,800 burned in February, a vacant Main Street home in Acton worth \$50,000 burned in April, a Market Street home in Georgetown worth \$130,000 burned, an Ashgrove house received \$30,000 in damages in May, four partially completed homes on Calvert Drive worth a total of \$80,000 burned in June and a \$60,000 barn fire on the Sixth Line last June, a Ballinacree business worth \$75,000 burned in July, in August a garage worth \$20,000 burned, in November a Dayfoot Drive home received \$40,000 in damages, and in December an Acton factory received \$10,000 in damage because of fire.

"When you are dealing with fire you are dealing with the unknown. It is very unpredictable," Chief Cunningham said. Fire prevention and upgrading fire-fighting techniques are the best ways to control fires, he added.

The department kept statistics when most fires occurred last year. They will continue to do this for 1986, Chief Cunningham said. In 1985 most fire calls were received between 4 and 5 p.m. Sunday, followed by Friday. "People are home when most fires occur," Chief Cunningham said. The introduction of 911, the regional emergency service number, is one improvement in 1985 that will help firefighters reach fires quicker. "911 was a big step forward in 1985. The region paid for the system," Chief Cunningham said.

The fire department hopes to have a second Opticom traffic controller installed at the Guelph Street and Mountainview Road. The first controller was installed at the Main and Maple Street intersection.

Opticom traffic controllers allow firefighters to get green lights when they need them most. Two trucks in the department have controls that can change traffic lights, so firefighters

waste less time at intersections. Truck operated devices and traffic light devices cost \$7,500 each.

The biggest department expenditure consisted of pagers carried by volunteer firefighters and staff. The pagers were ten years old and were replaced for \$450 each. There are 80 volunteer firefighters, 45 in Georgetown and 35 in Acton.

"The fire department is refurbishing rather than replacing fire trucks," Chief Cunningham said. A third truck was refurbished in 1985; the job cost \$14,000.

To help answer the increase in calls to automobile accidents, the department purchased an air bag system. The rubber bag fills with air and is capable of moving heavy objects, like cars.

The department visits businesses, homes and schools as part of the department's prevention program. The department is aware more hazardous chemicals are coming on the market.

"The growth of hazardous chemicals is an increasing concern. We try to get into industries as often as we can, and make certain materials are handled and stored properly," Chief Cunningham said. We have records of where they are stored, he added.

Chief Cunningham is a little disappointed that more people aren't taking advantage of the department's offer to check homes for fire safety. Appointments can be made by calling the department.

More staff proposed to help fight fires



A member of the Halton Hills Volunteer Fire Department enters a house on Church Street in a recent chimney fire alarm. False alarms are increasing in town, causing some concern for Fire Chief Bill Cunningham. (Herald photo)

As many as five full-time employees may be hired by the Halton Hills Fire Department in 1986. Four dispatchers and one training officer could be hired, Fire Chief Bill Cunningham said.

Dispatch services are currently on Guelph Street on the top floor of the Georgetown Volunteer Ambulance Service building. The department would like to build an addition to their Maple Avenue building where a dispatcher could work.

The cost of the project has not been decided, nor has council approved it. Chief Cunningham expects the new dispatchers will be in place by summer and possibly as early as May.

Computer-aided dispatch will not arrive until 1987, at the earliest, Chief Cunningham said. Department records won't be stored on computers until then. "There is no question, that will help us immensely," he said.

Duties of a full-time training officer would be to improve the level of training, and to research new equipment and make recommendations. There are 15 volunteers in Georgetown and 35 in Acton.

"We are well equipped and have no manpower problem. Volunteers are active and dedicated," Chief Cunningham said. A training officer would improve our service and allow the department to keep up on new techniques, Chief Cunningham added. The department will be putting out a fire prevention brochure in 1986 as it does every other year.

The municipal emergency plan should be ready by early spring. Halton Hills will be fully prepared for major disasters because of the plan.

Acton Chamber wants growth for their town

Warning to all politicians. The Acton Chamber of Commerce wants growth for Acton and they are going to do all they can to get it, Bill Cook, Chairman of the Acton Chamber said. Keeping a higher profile and getting involved in the issues are the ways they intend to succeed in 1986.

"We're going to be on their (the politicians') backs," Bill Cook said. Water is the main issue. More than anything else the Chamber wants more homes built in Acton. That won't happen until the water issue is resolved, Mr. Cook said.

"If we don't get more development, stores will be closing and how will people afford to live here?" Industry is needed to offset residential taxes, Mr. Cook said.

A higher profile will be accomplished by increasing Chamber membership, by using the press more and by being a voice for the people of Acton with complaints.

The chamber would like the Town Hall to be a base for their homeless organization. There they hope to hold monthly meetings which are the third Wednesday of every month. It would also be a good information centre for chamber brochures, Mr. Cook said.

For the first time in a couple of years, the Acton Chamber of Commerce is putting out a directory. They also inquired about the results of the recent tax assessment.

Halton waits for Crime-stoppers



Bill Cook

The Crimestoppers program didn't make it into the 1986 Halton Regional Police budget.

But off for several years now, the program which elicits public help in solving crime, was chopped in this year's police budget.

Dropping Crimestoppers helped pare the 1986 police budget from an 11.2 per cent increase to an 8.9 per cent increase. It was one of seven programs removed from the budget.

"I've received calls from numerous persons wanting to know why we haven't got Crimestoppers. It's an important program for the investigation and detection of major crime and gives the public the opportunity to make their community safe," Police Chief James Harding said.

This is the third year of "Let's have it next year", the Chief noted. "We're down, gentlemen, to bare bones," Chief Harding said.

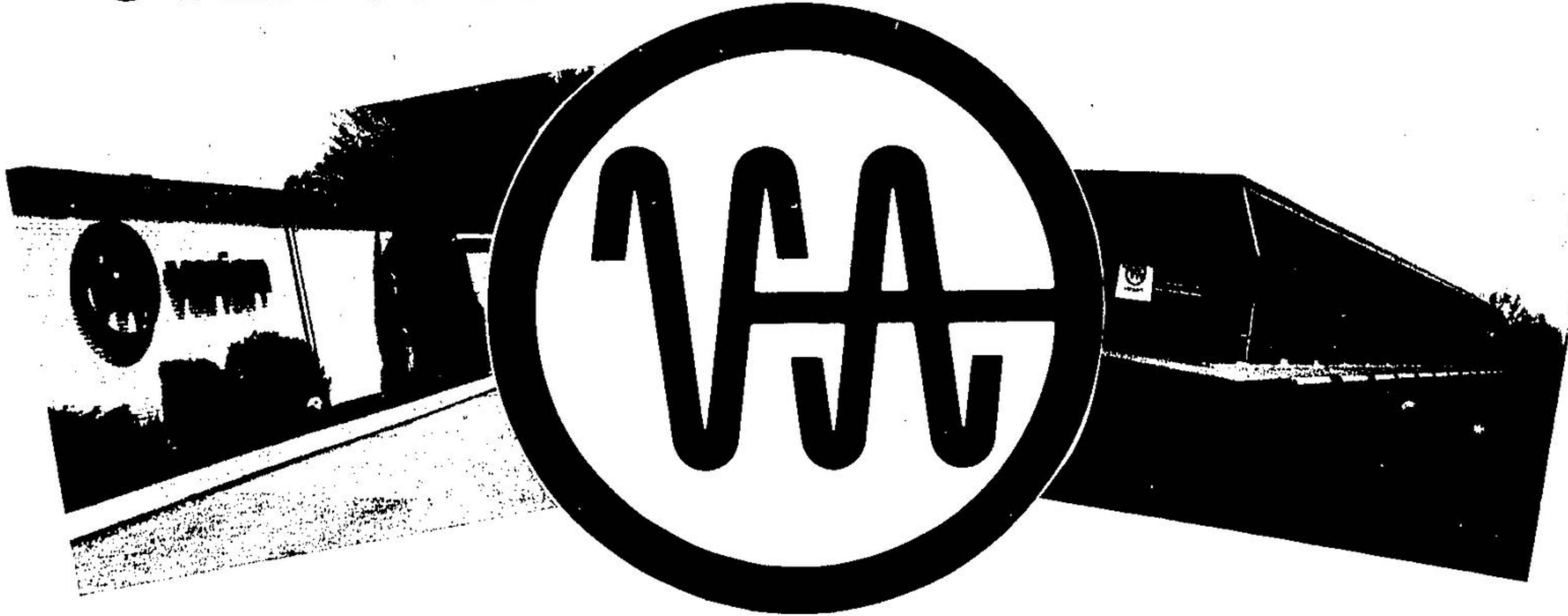
The November 1985 arbitration award granted by the Ontario Police Arbitration Commission was responsible for a substantial portion of this year's police budget, he said.

Over \$5 million in capital projects are slated for the next five years by the Halton Regional Police Force.

Police Chief James Harding outlined long-term needs of the Force, starting with \$20,000 for parking lots repaving at the Milton Station in 1986, plus some renovations.

In 1987, the third phase of the HEART computer project should be underway at a cost of \$800,000 and then the big projects start.

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