

Upgrading program saves jobs at Unilock

Eleven employees, or 70 per cent of Unilock's staff, will not be laid off from December to March of next year as a result of recently having upgraded their skills.

Before attending a five-week maintenance course at Sheridan College this past January these employees were only qualified to operate equipment used by the plant in manufacturing paving stones, the company's production manager, Phil Hardy said.

The Georgetown Unilock plant manufactures a variety of paving stones used in the construction of thoroughfares ranging from walkways to industrial streetscapes. The company has plants in Pickering, Barrie, Buffalo, Chicago and Michigan. According to Mr. Hardy, Unilock is the largest manufacturer of paving stones in North America.

As the period from December to March is the company's off-season, the plant's equipment is completely overhauled during this time, so only the specific skills of its maintenance staff is required, Mr. Hardy explained.

The 11 workers received fundamental training in pneumatics, hydraulics, mechanics, and welding, qualifying them to perform minor equipment repairs. Their newly acquired skills means the group will be employed during part of the plant's off-season, Mr. Hardy said.

To be employed for the entire off-season, they would have to go back to school fulltime and obtain an electrical engineering degree, Mr. Hardy said.

Both Mr. Hardy and the employees have seen the benefits

of the program. "Our down time is significantly less - the period when a machine breaks down and is repaired - so production is up," Mr. Hardy said. As for the employees they are richer. In previous years the 11 had to rely on unemployment insurance payments from January to March but from now on they will receive their full wages for part of this period.

Of the program, the employees all expressed satisfaction. Only the older of the group, being away from school for a long time, showed any reluctance to participate in the program, Mr. Hardy said. But they soon overcame their hesitation, he added.

Mr. Hardy said the company would never have been able to afford the program without a federal grant.

Unilock, through the Halton and Peel Industrial Training Advisory Committee's Apprenticeship Program, obtained the grant from the federal government's Skills Investment Program. The grant paid for the 11 employees' tuition and 60 per cent of their wages while in school, Mr. Hardy said. The company picked up the remaining costs.

Mr. Hardy said the company is so enthusiastic about the program, there are plans to have the 11 participate in a more advanced training program next January.

When asked if a lot of other seasonal companies are upgrading their workers' skills, he was doubtful because few know about the available government money. "If they did they would jump at the chance. There is a shortage of skilled workers out there," Mr. Hardy said.

Chamber Made Chamber is community-wide

Which of these statements are correct:

- All teenagers are trouble makers;
- All trade unionist are communists;
- All politicians are corrupt;
- All business people are get-rich-quick artists.

Of course, none of these statements are correct, they are all stereotypes that certain people have of each of the above groups. Recently the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce took a stand in regards to the Isaac Walton Fly Fisherman's Club by sending a letter to the Minister of Environment, a copy of which was published in this paper.

We knew that our position would not be popular with everyone in the community, but as taxpayers we have every right to express our point of view. Our letter also prompted other letters to the editor, one which categorized business people as "get-rich-quick artists" which is an unfair label to place on the hard-working business people of Halton Hills.

The Chamber is made up of both large and small companies and it should be noted that none of the developers who are building south of Georgetown are members, therefore we do not represent their interests. Many of our members operate small businesses working long, hard hours, they are not "get-rich-quick artists."

Take time to examine who you deal with during the day in our

business community, the small shop keeper where you buy your milk, the insurance broker, the mechanic who services your car, the restaurant where you have lunch, the baker, the butcher, the list is endless, none of these people fit the image of "get-rich-quick artists."

Our business community provides many local people with employment, places to shop, services that we all need and contributes not only time but money for many worthwhile community events. Our members not only operate businesses in Halton Hills, most also live here, they are responsible citizens of Halton Hills involved with a large variety of service groups.

AGM tomorrow

The Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce will hold its Annual Meeting on Wednesday, May 18 at noon hour at the Sacre Coeur Hall, Guelph St., Georgetown. This will be the first annual meeting of the Halton Hills

Chamber of Commerce since the merger of the Acton and Georgetown Chambers.

Garth Turner MP, will be the guest speaker for the noon hour meeting, and with the recent budget there are sure to be questions and concerns about the economy raised.

Tickets are still available by calling the Chamber office at 877-7119.

"Back to Acton" on June 24

The Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce is planning a repeat of the very successful "Back to Acton Days" on Saturday, June 24.

Downtown Acton will be transformed into a pedestrian mall from Frederick St. to Main St., merchants will display a large variety of goods for sale. In addition to the regular merchants on Mill St. other vendors will be there to supplement the variety of products.

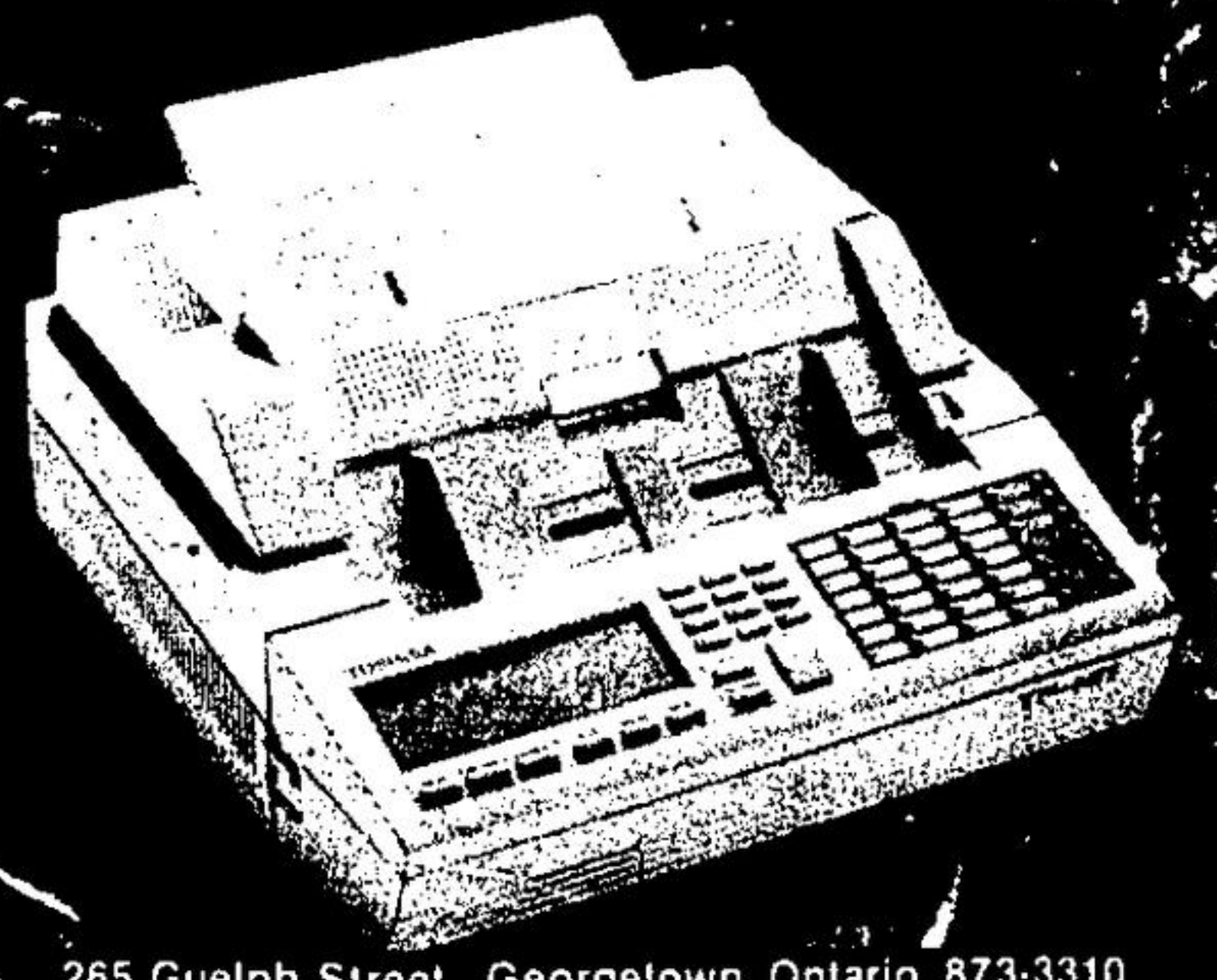
For further information please contact the Chamber office at 877-7119.

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Eleven Unilock employees who recently completed a five-week training program at Sheridan College, stand with their diplomas and the program's instructors outside one of the plant's main work areas. In the front row are, left to right, Phil Hardy, Tom Logan, Keith Buxton (instructor), Mike Wilson (instructor), Russ Curtis, John Pacheco, Bob Sweezy. In the back are Robert Soth, Darrell Orton, Dave Morris, John Sibson (instructor), Bill McIntosh, Keith Swizer and George Koestag. (Herald photo)

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