

Get to know 1989

Every year there are always a number of fascinating stories and events that create the fabric of towns like Halton Hills.

This year, although there was no one, dominating story that grabbed the headlines more than any other, there were a series of stories and events organized by a local group which, strung together generated interesting, important and relevant news crucial to the future of Halton Hills.

It is for those stories that we have chosen the citizens group POWER (Protect Our Water and Environmental Resources) the Herald's Newsmaker Of 1989.

The group that started out as 10 people organizing in a living room to fight the proposed Acton landfill site three years ago, has organized a thorough, ambitious and focused campaign that has included bringing in knowledgeable people to talk about recycling and demonstrations on the steps of Queen's Park.

But there were other people and events that grabbed headlines in 1989.

There are many people who could qualify as our Personality of the Year in 1989. Milton's irrepressible Bill Johnson is a perennial candidate for this award - especially in his role as the environmental conscience of Halton Region. POWER's John Minns seemed to be everywhere; always ready for a debate and anxious to get involved. Business Improvement Area Co-ordinator Margaret Vint, a colorful personality to say the least, is always at attention to keep downtown Georgetown vibrant. The former Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce general manager Doug Penrice kept us informed with his Chamber Made columns which actually took a stand on issues. For that virtue alone, we suspect, Mr. Penrice won't be a future politician. And one can't overlook our Mayor Russ Miller, whose political future is a hot topic of discussion among local councillors.

They're all good candidates, but we have chosen as our Personality Of The Year for 1989 Halton-Peel MP Garth Turner. His columns appearing weekly in the local media have given new meaning to the words political propaganda. Never one to be seen constantly towing the party line, Mr. Turner has consistently walked the edge of politics, never outright offending his constituents, rarely completely at odds with his own party.

For our Surprise of the Year, our new civic centre once again takes the spotlight. Although delayed by strikes, the centre came in relatively on time and on budget and the actual building is pleasant but not overdone. (Could they have learned from Mississauga's obnoxious new building?)

From the What Ever Happened To Department we wonder about energy from waste. Highly touted as a grand solution to the Region's waste disposal problems in the past years Energy From Waste was allowed to die on Halton's council table with a report that said merely that it isn't yet acceptable by the public. Humbug!

From the Holy Cow When Is This Going To End department we reported endless stories of the plight of people who live near the unlit then lit-too-much walkway between Irwin and Dawson Crescents. Finally, both sides saw the light and solved the problem.

And from the Oh, Stop Whining Department we wish Regional politicians would simply make their point then get on with it when it comes to the provincial government.

Always an easy target, the province likes to shoot itself in the foot but Regional politicians are usually in line to get a squeeze at the trigger.

Finally, the Bluff Of The Year award goes to the Halton Board of Education for threatening early in the year to close down and drain all its school-run pools, including the two in Halton Hills.

When town politicians muttered under their breath that a lawsuit could keep the pools open, the issue simply packed up and went away.

Nice going.

MPPs play financial games

Derek Neelson

Queen's Park
Thomson News Service



It's pay increase time at Queen's Park again. And once more, the government has taken the easy way out.

Premier David Peterson approved an inflation-line 5.5-per-cent salary increase for members and cabinet ministers.

This is the standard public relations approach to pay increases here, and has been since the mid-1970s under then premier Bill Davis.

It looks like the government is holding the line. In reality, it continues to bump salaries in other ways.

This year, for the first time, an additional wage increase goes to those MPPs who have the right connections to be made committee vice-chairmen or caucus chairmen.

It amounts to \$5,300 more for each of the half-dozen (the number varies over time) or so committee vice-chairmen and \$3,300 for each of the three caucus chairmen.

To understand the financial game that is being played here by Peterson (and which was played

by Davis before him), it is important to realize there are two classes of people who sit as MPPs in the legislature.

THE A-TEAM

One group, usually about 30 of the 130 members, sit in cabinet. They are paid \$75,200 a year, plus another \$14,500 in tax-free allowance (supposedly for expenses), which would be the equivalent of an ordinary taxable income of more than \$95,000 per year. Peterson himself is perhaps \$25,000 higher.

Cabinet ministers appear content with their incomes.

Meanwhile, the rest of the legislative menagerie feel they are the B-team when it comes to income. This includes all opposition members except party whips and leaders, as well as most government backbenchers. Adding in their latest raise, they make just \$43,500, although they also get the tax-free allowance, which brings the value of their income close to \$65,000.

But this doesn't really explain how much they make.

Back in the 1970s, when the Conservatives were struggling to hold back inflationary wage demands by civil servants, the idea that politicians might get wage increases beyond inflation didn't sit well with Davis.

On the other hand, politicians from all three old-line parties - and in particular the NDP - were crying poverty.

So, what Davis did was take the tax-free allowance - which was supposed to go for expenses like

constituency offices, telephones, driving around the riding and what not - and free it from those financial burdens.

The government started to pick up the tab for constituency offices, mileage, assistants and so on, meaning the tax-free allowance became gravy for the member.

'EXTRA' JOBS

At the same time, Davis increased the amount paid for all the "extra" jobs MPPs do.

These include sitting on committees during the seven months (on average) the legislature isn't in session, when they can make \$74 a day tax-free, plus \$27 daily for meals. There are famous stories about backbenchers who'd sit on two committees simultaneously so they'd be paid for both. Since parliamentary tradition says members are all "honorable gentlemen," there is no check on whether one is present after initially signing in.

Davis also expanded the number of jobs that received bonus money, as Peterson has done again.

The result now, by Conservative deputy house leader Norm Sterling's estimate, is that as many as 87 of the 94 Liberals, 13 of the 19 New Democrats and 11 of the 17 Tories make more than the basic salary.

But it is all slightly dishonest. Without research, no one knows what an MPPs is really paid annually.

Better to do what Sterling and others have suggested: boost the base salary in exchange for an end to all the special payments. No more piece work.



Cost-cutting attempts feeble

Vic Parsons

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Canadians who witnessed the federal government's feeble attempt at cost cutting are entitled to ask a question.

What's going on here? Treasury Board President Robert de Cotret tallied up the money-saving operation at \$1.4 billion over three years.

Excuse me, but even with the lashing that the government is giving your beloved capital - these days known as "Fat City" - that's a pretty piddling amount.

Compare the size of the cost-cutting package with the \$132 billion Ottawa is spending this fiscal year and the \$145-odd billion it'll fork out next.

It's the equivalent of saving your

cents on a \$10 purchase and bragging about the great bargain you made. Next fiscal year, the saving is even less.

The cuts are said to be part of the deal to reduce the proposed goods and services tax. More slashing is expected in next year's budget. The Commons finance committee is promising to offer advice early in 1990.

But, surely, if the government was serious, it could have made deeper cuts to the deficit.

It could save a great deal more money by easing up on interest rates.

MAJOR FACTOR

Interest charges on the national debt are the chief factor today in the ballooning of the deficit. Estimates by Finance Minister Michael Wilson in last April's budget have been cast to the winds because of higher-than-anticipated interest rates.

Here's what the Finance Department has to say in its latest Fiscal Monitor, covering the first six months of the current budgetary year: "The increase in the year-over-year deficit (\$2.4 billion) was more than accounted for by the impact of higher interest rates, on public debt charges.

Economists estimate that each percentage point rise in interest rates adds between \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion to the deficit.

Today, Canada's short-term interest rates are about four percentage points higher than those in the United States. The gap in the past has hovered around one percentage point.

Moreover, while Americans are now pondering a reduction in rates to help offset a possible recession, John Crow, our Bank of Canada governor, is continuing a tough line. His argument is that a relaxation of rates will increase borrowing and spending, thereby increasing prices. His pie-in-the-sky dream is zero inflation.

But Crow's fixation with inflation, more and more economists are arguing, is driving the economy toward perdition.

HURTS BUSINESS

Not only is it pushing the deficit up far faster than de Cotret's trifling spending reductions, but it's hurting our ability to do business.

That was brought home with a bang when October's trade figures showed that, for the first time in 13 years, Canadians bought more goods from foreigners than they purchased from us.