

# Conferences are 'educational'

Education is the principal reason Mr. Allison cited for going to 10 hydro-related conferences in 1989.

Mr. Allison went to the conferences to "become a better commissioner as far as the Town of Halton Hills is concerned," he said in an interview Friday. And the basis for choosing a conference or seminar is that after attending it the commissioner is significantly more knowledgeable about an aspect of the job.

Mr. Allison said at every conference a commissioner attends there is usually one speaker "you might have difficulty paying attention to, but by and large they (the seminars) are extremely educational."

The MEA strongly advocates that commissioners attend the association's affiliated conferences and seminars, the reason being "the more knowledgeable I am, the more credibility I have when it comes to decision-making within Halton Hills Hydro and the MEA," Mr. Allison said.

Mr. Allison said he was "ill equipped" to be a District 4 MEA representative when first elected to the body in November, 1988. "I had to attend a lot of different seminars" in 1989 to grasp the functions of municipal utilities.

Mr. Allison defined the MEA as the "voice for 316 utilities" in Ontario to speak to the provincial government, the Energy Board and Ontario Hydro.



**Murt Allison**

Participation in the MEA was the reason Mr. Allison gave to explain why he attended more conferences last year than the other four commissioners.

And records show in 1989 and 1988 Mr. Allison didn't attend more conferences than the majority of other commissioners.

When first asked why the Halton Hills commission spent more money on conferences in 1989 compared to Brampton Hydro and Orangeville Hydro commissioners, Mr. Allison explained the system is structured so that if a commissioner attends a conference then that person receives compensa-

tion. But later on during the interview when asked the same question, Mr. Allison said he couldn't make a comparison between the three commissions.

Mr. Allison used an upcoming Legal-Matters conference to explain the importance of conferences. The commission is expected to employ someone to implement and administer the provincial government's municipal Freedom of Information and Protection Act this year. But he can't be expected to hire a qualified staff person to do the job until having knowledge about the legislation, he said.

Mr. Allison also said attendance at the various conferences raises a commission's visibility in the community.

Mr. Allison's major expense last year was just over \$4,000 to attend the I.E.E.E. conference in New Orleans. The MEA manager of training and development, Leo Podetz, said this conference is aimed primarily at engineers. Mr. Allison justified his attendance at the conference because he wanted to find out about the different approaches of implementing a system of on-site billing. "I feel our utility should take advantage of this system," he said. And it's an idea that has been a "pet" project of his for several years, said Mr. Allison.

On-site billing means people would receive their hydro bill at

# Conferences a 'major source of learning'

Halton Hills Hydro commissioner Jim Fisher said the MEA annual meeting and the MEA Summer Conference are two of the most important conferences hydro commissioners can attend.

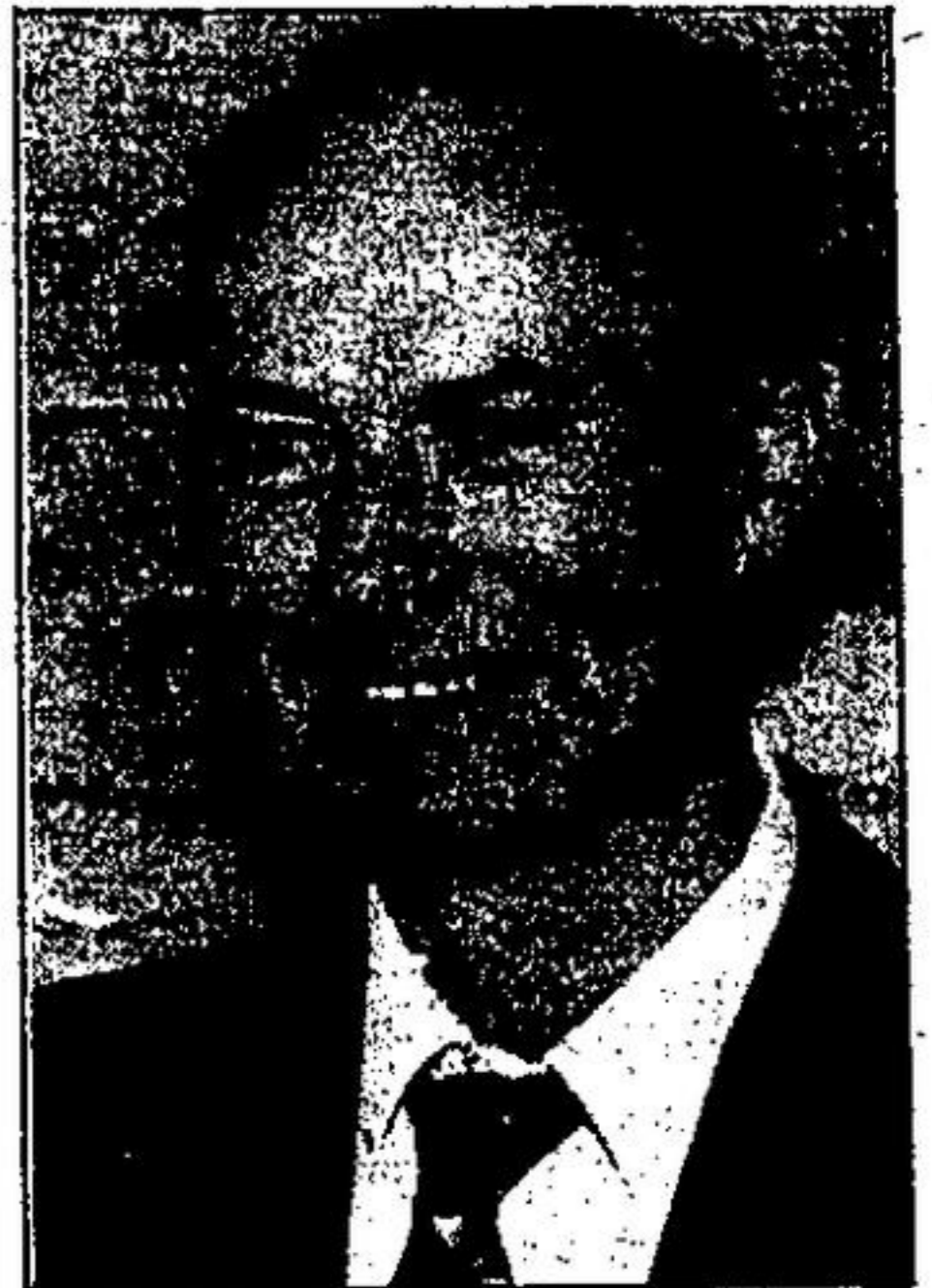
Mr. Fisher, who attended both these meetings in 1989, said they were not compulsory but to miss them would mean commissioners "wouldn't be representing their areas very well."

The MEA is a "major source of learning" for commissioners especially since Halton Hills is a relatively small utility and doesn't have the resources of larger utilities like Toronto, he said.

Mr. Fisher attended three other conventions in 1989 and they included the Commissioners-Manager Conference and several MEA training seminars and O.E.L. meetings.

He spent a total of \$3,600 to attend the five conferences.

When questioned about the proposed change in the policy about the commission covering the expenses of the spouses of hydro commissioners at conventions, Mr. Fisher suggested the current system is unfair. Not all wives ac-



**Jim Fisher**

companied their husbands to conferences, he explained. He speculated the system was initially introduced because a commissioner's stipend isn't very much. "So maybe it was something a little extra to merit the job," he said.



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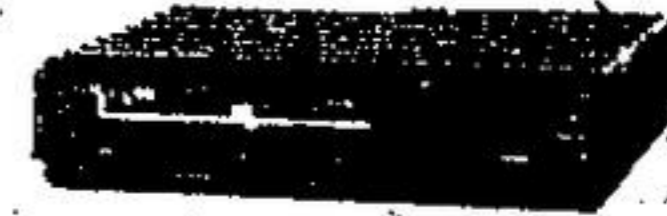
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