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HALTON HILLS, ONTARIO - WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8TH, 1992

Conference Centre destroyed by fire

By STEVEN LeBLANC
The Herald

The Ontario Fire Marshal's Office (FMO) is investigating the cause of a fire which destroyed the Halton Hills Conference Centre near Speyside early Friday morning.

According to Halton Regional Police, firefighters from Halton Hills and Milton were called to the centre, located on Hwy. 25 south of 15 Sideroad, at 9:45 p.m. Thursday evening. It then took the entire night and the early hours of the morning to bring the fire under control. Firefighters didn't leave the scene until well after 5 a.m., Friday morning.

Damage to the centre was estimated at \$350,000 by Ontario Government Fire Marshall Ron Chalmers. The cause of the fire is still unknown. Between 40 and 50 firefighters were called to the scene to help put out the fire.

The centre, which is often used as an executive conference meeting area, is the place of employment and residence of Cameron Sasyaumaker, who was out for diner in Acton at the time the fire broke out.

Mr. Sasyaumaker explained when he left the centre, the fire in the dining room fireplace was dying down.

According to police, upon initial investigation, Fire Marshall Chalmers believed arson was a possible cause of the fire because of two one-gallon gas cans found by the rear door. The cans were standing up with the caps on beside the rear stairway of the house.

Further investigation showed arson was an unlikely cause, because it was learned that the cans were

filled with diesel fuel purchased by Mr. Sasyaumaker a week ago and that the fuel had not been thrown around.

It is believed that the fire started somewhere between the dining-room fireplace and a Christmas tree in the same room, where the extent of damage is most severe. According to police, Fire Marshall Chalmers said embers from the fire could have ignited the rug, or that the lights on the Christmas tree could have ignited the tree.

According to Halton Hills Fire Prevention Officer Dave Ford, upon arrival at the centre, firefighters were unable to gain entry to the building, and it took four water tankers from Acton to extinguish the flames.

He explained heavy fog Thursday evening along with icy road conditions made their task more difficult. Road crews were called into for assistance.

A strong smell of smoke still existed by late Friday afternoon. The roof of the centre was completely gone and only a few walls, with extensive damage, remained standing.

The centre is owned by Waterloo resident Gerry Hofmeister, who purchased the property, which includes the main building and 44 acres of land, in February 1988 for \$650,000. The insurance claim on the building is \$430,000. The property, excluding the centre, is valued at \$2.1 million.

Mr. Hofmeister was on the scene after the initial investigation, but would not comment on the centre's history or his plans relating to the property.

The Town's year-end \$650,000 windfall

By BEN DUMMETT
The Herald

While the closure of several local businesses indicates Halton Hills has been hard hit by the recession, the high level of construction activity tells another story.

According to statistics issued by the Town's Building Department, a total of 924 building permits were issued locally last year adding close to \$1 million to the Town's coffers.

Considered another way, builders spent a total of \$98.8 million in 1991 on construction in Halton Hills.

Not bad considering the Town only issued just under \$300,000 worth of building permits during 1990.

Commenting on the high level of construction activity Henry Tse, Town Building Code and Bylaw Enforcement Director, said Friday, "Halton Hills has been very fortunate."

The Town hired Mr. Tse late last year to head up the newly formed Building Code and Bylaw Enforcement Department. The new department is meant to streamline the Town's various enforcement responsibilities.

Mr. Tse was unable to give a definitive reason explaining why the Town experienced a high level of construction activity last year.

He did speculate however part of the reason may have been because high Toronto-area land prices in 1988 forced developers to look elsewhere for developable land.

A willingness by local trades people to work at a reasonable rate may have been another reason for developers' willingness to build in the area, Mr. Tse offered.

He doesn't expect his department to issue the same total of building

permits this year as were issued in 1991. However, Mr. Tse is optimistic construction activity will be higher in 1992 than that of two years ago.

At the end of 1990 just under \$300,000 worth of building permits had been issued. This figure was approximately \$500,000 short from what the Town had originally projected for that year.

Most building permits issued last year were for residential development.

Two of the largest developments built last year included the Law Development Kingsmill project on River Drive in Georgetown and the further expansion of Fernbrooke Homes development in Georgetown South.

Law Development is also expected to be a major purchaser of construction permits this year.

Town Planning Director Ian Keith said the Law Development group is expected to build more than a 100 homes off of Trafalgar Road in 1992.

Mr. Keith said construction will

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