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PITCH-IN CANADA!

Johnston dukes it out with Harding

Last week Halton Regional Police chief James Harding and an assorted band of hangers-on dropped in on a committee meeting for regional councillors. This is a rare event, and that's probably for the best given what happened.

Chief Harding was there to run an idea up the regional flagpole and see if he could get councillors to salute. He got a half-hearted nod from some and a regular raspberry out of the cheap seats, from Halton Hills councillor Pam Johnston.

In short, chief Harding wanted to steer councillors toward spending around \$6.5 million on a new radio network that would combine all Halton's emergency services in what is called trunk system. It's radio-wave based but works more like a telephone, but at the aforementioned cost, we're talking Rodeo Drive radio.

Some politicians, keenly aware that many of their constituents have crashed from the quiche-eating eighties into the Kraft dinner nineties, were uneasy about the \$6.5 million. They said so. This prompted a short but stern lecture from chief Harding about "the potential danger to officers and citizens" if something isn't done and the "grave sense of urgency" in beefing up police radio communications.

Appearing equally put out, Ms Johnston offered the following reply: "One thing that really upsets me is that whenever we're dealing with the police, it's not a logical or rational approach." Instead, councillors "always find the chief or some other members of the force have to use threats or intimidation" to get what they want.

Of course, it's no laughing matter if the police radio system doesn't work well, and if chief Harding said it's less than reliable, I don't doubt that's the case. Chief Harding is a man of integrity, I submit. He's done good things in Halton and across Ontario, especially his work on race relations.

But he's also pompous and used to throwing his weight around. He's a bureaucrat, a civil servant, who acts like he won an

Rob Kelly

**Milton Champion
News Editor**

election. So it's appropriate that he get his Goodyear blimp sized ego pricked, especially in front of some of his groupies.

I suppose it's easy for someone like chief Harding to fall into the trap of acting like Louis XVI. After all, he runs what amounts to a \$38 million a year corporation organized on para-military lines. When he says jump, most cops start looking for a soft place to land. His nominal board of directors, the police commission, is usually there to offer benediction to this benign dictatorship. It's a situation many a corporate CEO dreams about;

Chief Harding was regally aloof almost as soon as he walked into the room last week. It was a relatively small committee chamber. Some of his officer-groupies were already there. When His Highness hit the doorway, they stood in a reasonable imitation of attention. There was an electronic engineering consultant at the end of the line, the guy who was getting paid for the radio network report. Not wanting any static, undoubtedly, he pulled his civilian frame up into the appropriate attitude too.

His Magnificence ignored this display. It was taking place less than five feet from him as he hobnobbed with politicians. (If he didn't see it, I just hope he never goes to the pistol range when other people are there). He didn't say 'thank you,' or 'please sit down.' He let the help hang out to dry for a few minutes, standing awkwardly, until they sat, uneasily.

That surprised me because normally chief Harding is a by-the-book type of guy. Once, about a year ago, he gave a spiel to regional councillors about why he needed money for something else, with

an accompanying brief. I asked a groupie for a copy of the text, which was public information because it had been presented at a public meeting.

The groupie turned to chief Harding, in tried and true flunky fashion, and asked if it would be okay to give me the report. A regal negative nod formed the silent answer.

"That's alright," I said, in a unfortunate break with palace protocol. 'I'll get one from a councillor in five minutes anyway.' This elicited a royal shrug of indifference. One of the area mayors was happy to share the report, which was in no way controversial except for the fact that it showed the cop brass, as usual, wanted more cash.

So I was kind of pleased when Pam Johnston, of all people, said the emporer has no clothes last week. She was right in this instance. Chief Harding overreacted. The councillors were edgy about the high cost of the new radio net, but the cops already had a fallback position, which was simply upgrading the old radio system at less cost. Councillors never gave an indication they wouldn't do that. It was unfair of His Majesty to start railing about police safety. It was knee-jerk stuff.

I never considered councillor Johnston much of a public servant until lately. She's the one, you may recall, who recently enjoyed a \$1,500 junket to British Columbia at taxpayers' expense. This at a time when Halton Region was cutting daycare to save money.

But at least she brought back a handful of reports from the various meetings he attended out there, and she went out of her way to present them to various regional committees, working overtime, as it were. And she's becoming more vocal on a number of issues.

There are, at present, not real bright lights on regional council from Halton Hills, but Ms Johnston's star seems to be rising.

(Rob Kelly is news editor for our sister publication the Milton Champion and covers regional issues for that newspaper.)

OUT and ABOUT

A Free listing of Community Events in Georgetown and Acton as well as the townships of Erin and Eramosa

Rotary Club garage sale

The Georgetown Rotary club will hold a garage sale on Saturday, May 9, 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Georgetown Autohaus, 199 Guelph St. Toys, tools, household articles, small furniture, books, glassware, dishes, etc. are needed. All donations gratefully received. For pick-up call 877-5285, 877-4521 or 877-6198.

Foot care clinic

The Victorian Order or Nurses, Halton Branch, will hold a foot care clinic at Georgetown and District Memorial Hospital, emergency department, on May 19, 1-4 p.m. The cost is \$15. For an appointment and further information call 1-800-387-7127.

United Way meets

United Way of Halton Hills's annual meeting will be held May 20, 5 p.m. in St. George's church hall, Guelph St., Georgetown. Everyone is welcome. Refreshments will

be served.

Farewell celebration

On Saturday, May 23, at 6:30 p.m., Holy Cross Hall, the community is invited to attend a dinner and dance farewell celebration for Rev. Nancy Knox of St. John's United Church and her husband, Carl Schenk. For tickets, \$25, contact Haydn's Music Shoppe, 873-8201 or the church office, 877-2531.

Lorne Scots reunion

The Regimental Band of the Lorne Scots (Peel, Dufferin and Halton) is planning a reunion in late September 1992 to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the regiment. An evening of dinner and dancing will be preceded by a social afternoon to renew old friendships and band music. Please advise the name and address of any past members of the band who may be interested. Call Ken L. Allen, RR2 Acton, 519-853-1667.

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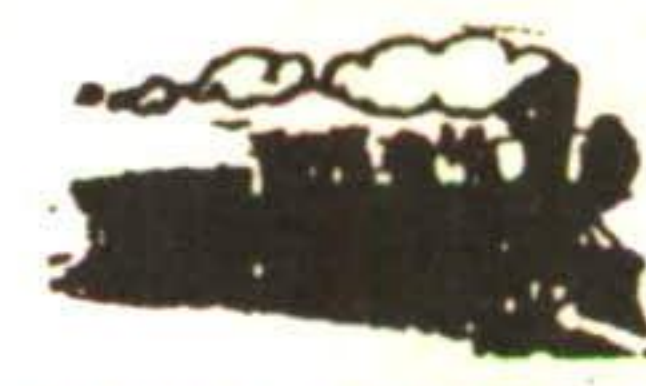
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