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'HOMETOWN PAPER, NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS!'

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 1996

## Money trouble motive for Acton arson?

BY FRANCES NIBLOCK  
The Acton Tanner

The crushing debt load that allegedly led Ken and Patricia Thomson to torch their Acton home four years ago was highlighted during cross examination of Ken Thomson in a Milton court room on Monday.

The Thomsons, now living out west with their two children, have each pleaded not guilty to a charge of arson endangering life — that of a firefighter — and arson to defraud their insurance company in connection with a Jan. 25, 1992 fire at 3 Young St.

The Court heard that two separate fires were set using a flammable liquid, including gasoline left in a garbage bag. No one was at home at the time of the fire, in-

cluding the family pets.

Although Thomson repeatedly told the court he could not remember, could not recall and wasn't sure about his financial state prior to the fire, Crown James Cornish showed Thomson a series of letters and court papers indicating that the Thomsons had not been able to meet their mortgage payments on the house from the time they first purchased it.

In his opening address Cornish said the Thomsons bought the house in 1986 for \$81,600 with a \$61,500 mortgage which was increased to over \$170,000 by January 1992.

In December 1991 the bank holding the mortgage evicted the Thomsons under a power of sale. Four months later the Thomsons

arranged a private loan to pay off the mortgage and the family moved back in. Fifty-three days later the house burned.

When questioned if he had debts with Tri-Star Finance or the Brick, Thomson testified that he could not remember, and at first said he did not have a credit card, but then admitted that one had been seized at a gas station because of an outstanding balance in 1989.

Thomson also testified he could not recall if he had been unable to pay his hydro bills or how many times his hydro had been shut off for non-payment. Cornish showed Thomson a copy of a Guelph Small Claims Court judgment against him for non-payment of hydro bills and asked if that rang a bell.

Last week the Court heard that

the Thomsons were also collectively \$73,000 in arrears in their income tax and had declared bankruptcy in 1993.

Cornish suggested to Thomson that walking away from the house would not have relieved him of the debt because if the bank didn't recoup the amount of money owned through a power of sale, Thomson would be "on the hook" for the balance.

Cornish also repeatedly questioned Thomson's assertion that he did not know that his insurance policy guaranteed replacement costs for lost items. The contents of the house were insured for \$157,000 and the house for \$210,000.

When Cornish suggested that if he did not torch the house himself,

he had someone do it, Thomson testified, "We did not do this, nor were we a party to it."

At press time the defense continued to call witnesses. The case could go to the jury as early as today (Wednesday).

## Arena budget to be figured

Within weeks the Town's budget committee will decide how much money will be spent on the Acton East arena and community centre.

The budget includes \$4.1 million for construction, but that figure was penciled in before provincial grant and spending cutbacks.

Arena steering committee chair, Councillor Norm Elliott, said he is 99 per cent sure that enough councillors are committed to the project to make it a reality this year.

"In two or three weeks staff will come back and show us what they have been able to eliminate and pare down, so the budget is as acceptable to Council as possible," Elliott explained on Friday.

"The key vote is not so much what staff thinks, but it's Council affirming the budget, and I'm pretty confident that will happen. What we want to do is put in the best facility we can afford."

The committee toured five area facilities last Thursday and saw everything from a \$1.5 million "utilitarian box" with an ice surface to a \$10 million "Taj Mahal" with fitness rooms, a pool and library.

Elliott said the tour, to Milton, Oakville and Burlington facilities, gave them a good sense of what is out there, at various price ranges.

"We looked at arena designs,  
See ARENA, Page 2



KEEPING IN HARMONY: The quartet of Stephanie Smith, Lee-Anne Gay, Jennifer Johnson and Megan McDowell had their moves as well as their voices in sync as they performed *Chapel of Love* at Acton High School's "A Night of Romance" last Wednesday. The evening also included an art display and a one-act play performed by students. (Eve Martin photo)

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