



A blazing career ends

Milton's Fire Chief Harold Penson retires after 35 years

By ANN KORNUA

After thirty-five years it's time for Milton's Fire Chief, Harold Penson to hang up his

uniform and retire. For most of his life, Chief Penson has been saving lives, putting out fires and educating the community on the importance of prevention and fire safety. December 9 will mark the farewell celebration given by the town to mark Harold's years of hard work and duty.

"I WILL MISS IT"

His father was a Fire Captain and was the inspiration behind Harold's involvement in the local fire service. Harold reflects on his early years helping his father out on calls. "I had a chance in the late 60's to go to a few fire calls with my father and they gave me a job to do that was safely away from the fire maintaining the portable pump." Harold said. "That got my interest into being a fire fighter. I attended a few fires in town and years ago when a fire fighter would go on vacation they would ask their neighbour or a close friend to cover for them. I was always on hand to help out," Harold smiled slightly and said "They don't do that now, of course. There is too much training a person is required to learn and we can't put people in that position today. But back then, I was always asked to assist in jobs and that's how I got started. I knew many of the fire fighters from my father and they asked me one day in 1977 to join up full time."

Chief Penson has watched the Milton Fire Department grow from tiny beginnings

to what it is now. "I have had the opportunity to see it when it was in the basement of the old town hall because my father was in the fire department at the time. I have seen the department make progress over the years as Milton has grown. That is something that I figured would have taken a little longer to happen, but it has started to roll now." Harold says. Though the locations have changed over the years the goals behind the service still stay the same, even if the scope of the service has expanded. Today the Fire Department Services are not only about fire fighting, but they have adopted other rescue services into their line of duty. "Fire services have taken a different turn in the past years and we are more of an emergency service then just fire fighting alone. The fire fighting is just one component of the whole picture and I saw that change," Harold said. "We have gradually progressed into auto extrication rescue, handling hazardous materials, and to ice-water and mountain rescue."

Today the trucks at the Milton Fire Department are specialized to do a selection of outfitted rescue operations. From jaws of life to onboard ice water rescue equipment, the Milton Fire Department is fully prepared for any accident that may happen. "We just got a new rescue truck in August and we have been adding equipment on the truck that we will require. It has an air unit on it with air tanks set up so we don't need to keep running back to the station. It's a larger truck than the ones we used to use so it can hold all this equipment," Harold says.

As the Fire Chief, Harold is responsible for the budget as well as being in charge of the whole fire department. "My job as Chief is strictly administration, but I do respond to fire calls and I do go out for moral support and take command if I am required to. When

the pager goes off you turn on the radio and when there is something that you should be at you just go," Harold explains. For years he would be woken up in the middle of the night to respond to calls. "There have been several Christmases when I had to get up during dinner to go fight fires. One thing about this job is that you have to be on call all the time. People have accidents and they can happen at any time," Harold said.

"THE FLAMES ROLLING OFF THE BUILDING WERE SO LOUD IT WAS DEAFENING"

One of the biggest fires Harold fought in was at Hanz Chemicals plant on Nipissing Road. They had phosphorous chemicals in storage at the plant for the US army and static electricity was responsible for setting off a number of fires. "The last fire we fought there was a large one and I remember the building was completely engulfed. I was up on the aerial ladder and I remember the flames rolling off the building were so loud it was deafening. We had to knock all the chemicals on the floor and keep it wet so it wouldn't catch on fire. We spent a number of days there making sure the fire was out and its situation stayed under control," Harold says.

"I will miss it," Harold said at last looking towards his retirement. "Over 35 years of being in the fire service I will definitely miss it, but I am looking forward to retiring. I'll take some time off and think about what I want to do, maybe travel. Life is too short to work until you're seventy and I figured its time to enjoy life."

Plans are in the works to build a new central fire station in downtown Milton, something Chief Penson is excited to see after his retirement. "I can't tell you where it's going, but I can tell you we have been looking at a number of downtown locations. We also have two more fire locations in the future growth of Milton for quicker response to emergencies." Harold may be gone after this Christmas, but the years of dedication he put into Fire Services in the Town of Milton will always be remembered.



Milton Fire Department's Chief Harold Penson will have celebrated his thirty five years of service when he retires this December.

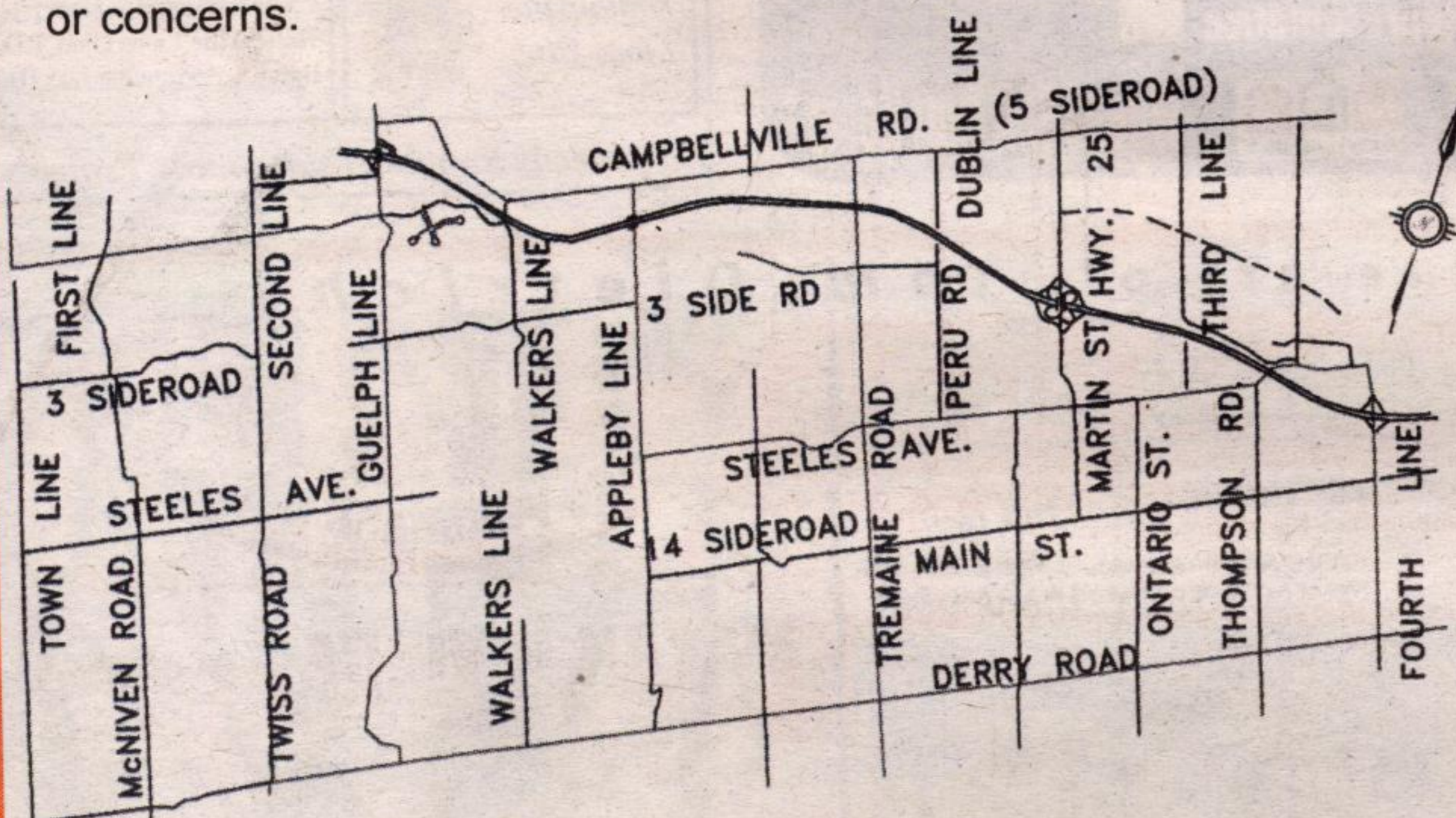
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The trimming of trees will commence December 1, 2004 and will be completed on or about April 29, 2005.

Please call the Engineering Department if you have any questions or concerns.



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