

Focus on Harold Penson

Fighting fires before they start

By Peter Mills
Fighting fires is one thing. Preventing them is another.

Harold Penson's main duty as a Milton firefighter is to prevent fires, a position he sees as one with great responsibility. Simply put, he has to educate people on the dangers that fires pose. "I try to get people to think about fire. Fire can kill."

"If you have a small fire in your house; nothing huge, even just a little one, you never forget it."

"It makes you very conscious of what it can do and you find yourself doing a lot more checking for fire hazards."

One of the ways Mr. Penson works to prevent fires is by inspection. He and Barney Coulson, another full-time Milton firefighter, do the inspections.

"When we go to new buildings being built, we check to see they conform to the Ontario Building Code. We check their fuse panels, see

they have fire walls and fire doors where necessary. In general, we make sure there are no fire hazards."

When asked, home inspections will also be done. This consists of inspecting the fuse panel and furnace room, checking against the use of extension cords and the so-called "octopus" wiring at electrical outlets.

"As well, we make sure curtains are at least two inches above heaters, and make sure people don't run electrical wires underneath rugs."

"The most common hazard is people storing combustible material under the fuse panel. Once a guy had his sofa under the panel, and something happened and a fire started and spread to the couch."

There isn't much demand for home inspections which can be arranged by calling the fire department and setting up an appointment.

Mr. Penson says people

will call when they are first moving into a house, but that isn't enough.

"What I would like to see is for the council to hire a couple more full-time firefighters so we could go door-to-door and inspect every house in town once a year."

"We need the extra people because there is so much to do here during the day, such as truck maintenance, tours coming through, etc. There isn't the time to go door-to-door."

He said he didn't really know exactly when he decided he wanted to be a firefighter.

"I guess I've always wanted to be a firefighter. My dad was a captain in the department, and he would bring guys home with him and help them with their studies. I listened in and I learned a little bit about it."

Almost 10 years ago, he became a part-time firefighter.

Eight years later, he became full-time, with the understanding he was

going to be concentrating on fire prevention.

He has no compunctions about hearing a fire alarm.

"When the bell goes, I go. It's part of my job. I accept it and my wife accepts it."

Harold also has a daughter Jennifer, aged five, and a son Christopher, aged 16 months.

He enjoys playing hockey or baseball when he isn't fighting fires or preventing them.

Recalling Milton's fire-trucks have occasionally been delayed trying to reach a fire because a train was blocking the road at the time, he said an overpass or underpass on Ontario St. would be "a big help to the fire department."

Harold suggested a substation should be built in the southern part of the town. With the Timberlea subdivision now under construction, he felt a site close to the intersection of Derry Rd. and Ontario St. would be ideal.

"We have some

volunteers who live in the southern part of town and sometimes they will go straight to the fire instead of coming to the Steeles Ave. fire station first."

"It can be a long drive for them to come here first. It can take a long time if you have several traffic lights and a train in the way."

He enjoys his job and is in the process of taking a 15-week fire prevention

course at the Ontario Fire College in Gravenhurst.

The course is split into three five-week sessions. He completed the first in December. The second is in May, and the third is in 1980.

He said he had a scare during the Hand Chemical fire of several years ago in which he was one of the first to reach the blaze.

"I was about 20 feet

from the building, getting the hoses ready when I saw the roof just starting to lift off the building."

"I tell you, I ran for all I was worth. All fires scare me. You never know what's going to happen. You have to think about what you're doing, and can't just rush in. You've got to use the ol' head."

"The only good fire is a

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SOME SOUVENIRS OF FIRES can be seen at Milton's main firehall, giving hints to the causes of some fires. Harold Penson holds a piece of a plastic Christmas tree which melted onto a Christmas light bulb and a rubber toy, stored too close to a lamp blub. On his desk sits a blown fuse with the copper plating wound onto the terminal. This is a fire hazard because it leads to overheated wires. Also on the desk is a light bulb which fell victim to the intense heat of most fires, and melted into the shape of an icicle.

Plan International Year of the Child

Representatives of about 20 agencies in Halton met recently in Stewarstown to lay plans for local projects during International Year of the Child, (IYC), 1979.

IYC was declared by the United Antional General Assembly, Dec. 21, 1976 in the hope that the nations of the world would review programs for the well being of children, guest speaker Jane McKinnon said.

McKinnon, who is the provincial co-ordinator for IYC and works for the Provincial Secretariat for Social Development, explained the role of the provincial government in the project and how community groups could get involved.

Although Ontario has outstanding health and social agencies in comparison with an estimated 350 million children in Third World countries who receive less than the minimum to subsist on,

other problems are created by the progressive and fast moving changing society, she said.

In Ontario, Premier William Davis has pledged the support of his government to IYC and there has been enthusiastic response from ministries and provincial agencies, she said.

But no extra money has been granted for IYC and the ministries and agencies have to build on current programs and expertise, she stated.

At the federal level a Canadian Commission for IYC has \$1 million in grants, she said. The maximum grant is \$1,500 to an individual and \$5,000 to a group. "But it's for all of Canada."

For more information about the federal grants, write to Tom Schatzky, Canadian Commission for IYC, 323 Chapel Street, Ottawa, Ont., K1N 7Z2.)

She said the theme selected by the province is "Today is for Tomorrow."

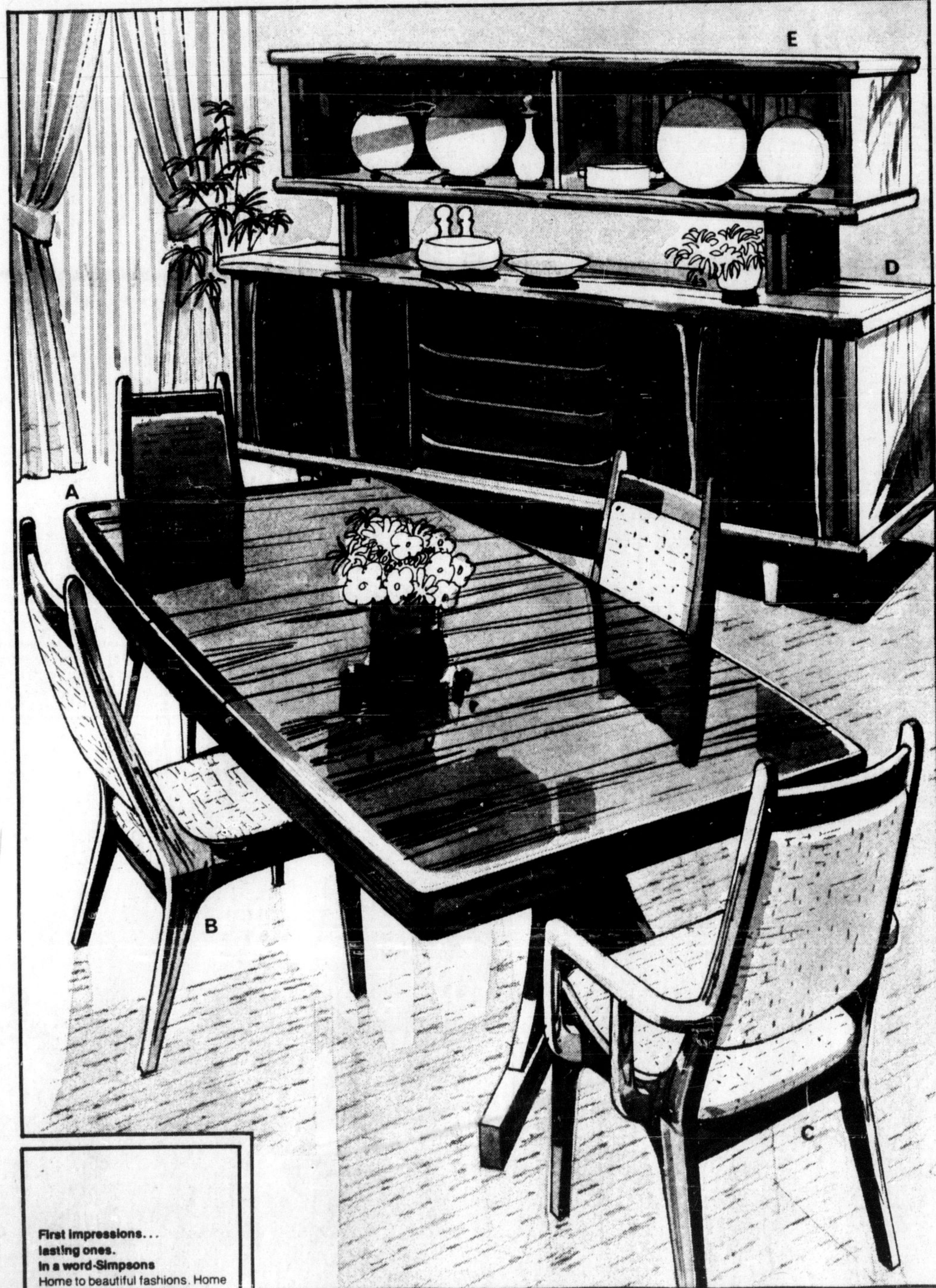
There are 17 ministries participating in the project while others, like the treasury department which collects taxes, are conducting staff awareness campaigns, McKinnon said.

The Ministry of the Environment is to produce a booklet to help parents introduce children to nature, the Ministry of Health is starting a preventive dental care program in elementary schools and a screening of newborn infants will be expanded to include tests that may lead to prevention of mental retardation, she said.

The group plans to meet again. Anyone interested in indicating their interest in helping can get in touch with Anne Pickering, recreation co-ordinator in Halton Hills, 877-5185.

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