

Paddling upstream to get heart starters; Penson

By IRENE GENTLE

The Champion

Defibrillators may save lives, but they can't be added to Milton fire trucks without a hefty increase in full-time staff, the Town's community services committee heard recently.

"Putting defibs on the trucks is easy," said Fire Chief Harold Penson. "The hard part is having the people who can respond."

Defibrillators are small electric shock paddles used on the hearts of patients suffering from cardiac arrest.

A report by Chief Penson showed that the paddles are often instrumental in saving the lives of cardiac patients.

However, they are only effective when applied within eight minutes of the attack.

And consistently speedy response times is a must under Ministry of Health guidelines for equipping fire trucks with defibrillators.

That is a standard the Milton department can't always satisfy, said Chief Penson.

Currently, Milton has a full-time, 10-hour day shift at one station.

When they are on, fire trucks respond in a speedy 3-4 minutes to the urban area.

But that lags to 11 minutes when volunteer, on-call staff are brought into the picture.

That's just too long for defibrillators to be of use.

Will come back

But the issue will be resuscitated in 2003, promised Chief Penson.

At that time, Milton may boast around the clock, full time fire staff in at least one station.

That should improve response times enough to bring defibrillators on board.

"At that time I'll come back to council and we'll be talking about defibrillators," he said.

Then, the Milton department could also participate in a full-tiered response program.

That means the fire department would be routinely dispatched along with ambulance services in

order to perform medical assists.

This would likely happen in cases where there is a difficulty or absence of breathing, unconsciousness, severe bleeding or heart attack.

The fire department would also be sent out to assist at vehicle collisions.

Currently, Milton fire trucks are only dispatched when there is a known delay in ambulance response.

The best option would be to keep the status quo until more firefighters can be hired, suggested Chief Penson.

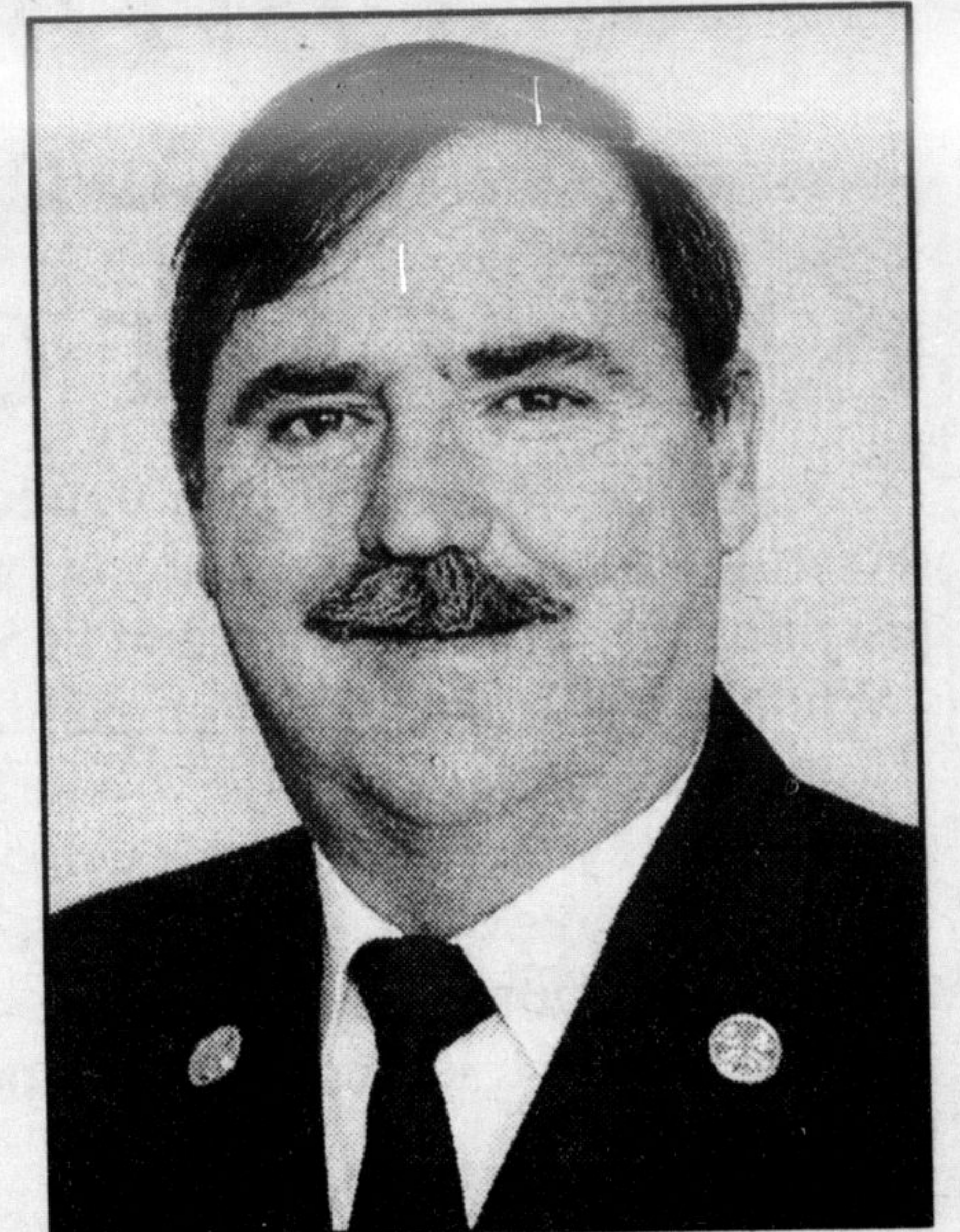
He also encouraged the Town to petition Halton Region for a second ambulance for the area.

Adding defibrillators to fire trucks is a health care issue that should be paid for out of the provincial government purse, said Mayor Gord Krantz.

"I think what a lot of us are thinking now is that we're getting into health care," he said. "The proper funding for health care is provincial."

In the end, it is the pocketbook that will dictate

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Chief Harold Penson

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