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Josie with Michaela, Daniela and Nicholas Andreadis Burlington, Ontario

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Trustee questions principals' \$48,000 retreat at ski resort

By **KIM ARNOTT**
Special to The Champion

A \$48,000 retreat held last week for Halton's 160 principals and vice-principals was an important and worthwhile team-building exercise, according to public school board officials.

Halton District School Board Education Director Dusty Papke and board Chair Ethel Gardiner both adamantly defended the conference, which came under attack this week by Burlington trustee Peggy Russell.

Ms Russell questioned the decision to hold the conference at the Talisman Mountain ski resort rather than using a board facility here in Halton.

"We have high schools with air-conditioning and nice facilities this could have been held at," she said. "I'm sorry, but we've all got to get smarter about how we spend money."

The professional development conference, which has been held annually since 1969, offers the school administrators a chance to discuss important system goals, attend workshops and hear from keynote

speakers, said Mr. Papke.

It has traditionally been held outside of Halton to allow people to focus, avoid distractions and build a sense of team, he added.

The board also has a contractual obligation with its principals and vice-principals to provide professional development opportunities.

"It's a very important part of our system growth," said Mr. Papke. "I think it pays dividends for us."

Ms Gardiner added that board staff managed to keep the cost of the two-day conference down to \$300 per person and even sought corporate sponsors to help cover the expense.

Twelve corporate sponsors contributed to the conference, with donations ranging from \$100 to \$2,500.

Mr. Papke said the conference, which was moved to the summer months about four years ago to avoid disruption to the school year, allows school administrators a chance to connect and create mentoring opportunities.

"These are critical leaders in our system," he said. "There's a real team-building

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