

# Security deposit decision victory for businesses

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After nearly two years of lobbying by the Milton Chamber of Commerce, the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) has defined its policy on consumer security deposits.

"The final policy is what we see as good business practice, in the private or public sector," said Chamber Executive Director Sandy Martin.

"Our primary goal was to ensure that recognition be given to good payment history and that security deposits be fairly structured and reflect the customers' payment history or credit rating. We were successful."

In June 2002, Milton Hydro asked for a permanent security deposit from its large volume users. Under provincial de-regulation, local distributors like Milton Hydro were left unprotected from bad debts and were able to act independently.

In what was seen in Ontario to be a test case, Milton Hydro set policy requiring a deposit equal to 2.5

times the customer's highest month of energy consumption in the past year, regardless of past credit history.

The amounts of these deposits ranged from thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars and impacted 220 Milton businesses.

"We had members calling saying this action by Milton Hydro could put them out of business and that they never would have built here if they had known about this new policy," Ms Martin said.

She said the Chamber contacted other chambers and found that many local hydro distributors were setting a wide range of security deposit policies.

"This was leading to inequities from one town to another and often affecting branch plants for major manufacturers across the province," Ms Martin said.

The Chamber took immediate action, first getting a ruling from the OEB that the local hydro distributor didn't have the right to shut

off service for not paying a security deposit if the customer was paying all his utility bills on time.

A special Chamber volunteer committee was set up to meet with local businesses, Milton Hydro, Milton Town Council, Milton MPP Ted Chudleigh and ultimately with the OEB.

The OEB then agreed to set up a working group panel to advise on establishing province-wide policy for security deposits.

Milton was the only Chamber to get representation on that panel and the OEB has just recently announced its decisions on security deposits for all hydro distributors across the province.

Under the new OEB structure, security deposits will be based on two times the company's average, not peak, monthly usage.

Deposits will be waived for major hydro customers with either a AAA+ credit rating or seven years good payment history with any recognized hydro facility. This

won't penalize new companies moving into Milton.

Ms Martin said she sees the OEB's decisions as a victory for Milton businesses.

"It proves that even a relatively small community, with determination to work within the system, can make a significant and positive impact."

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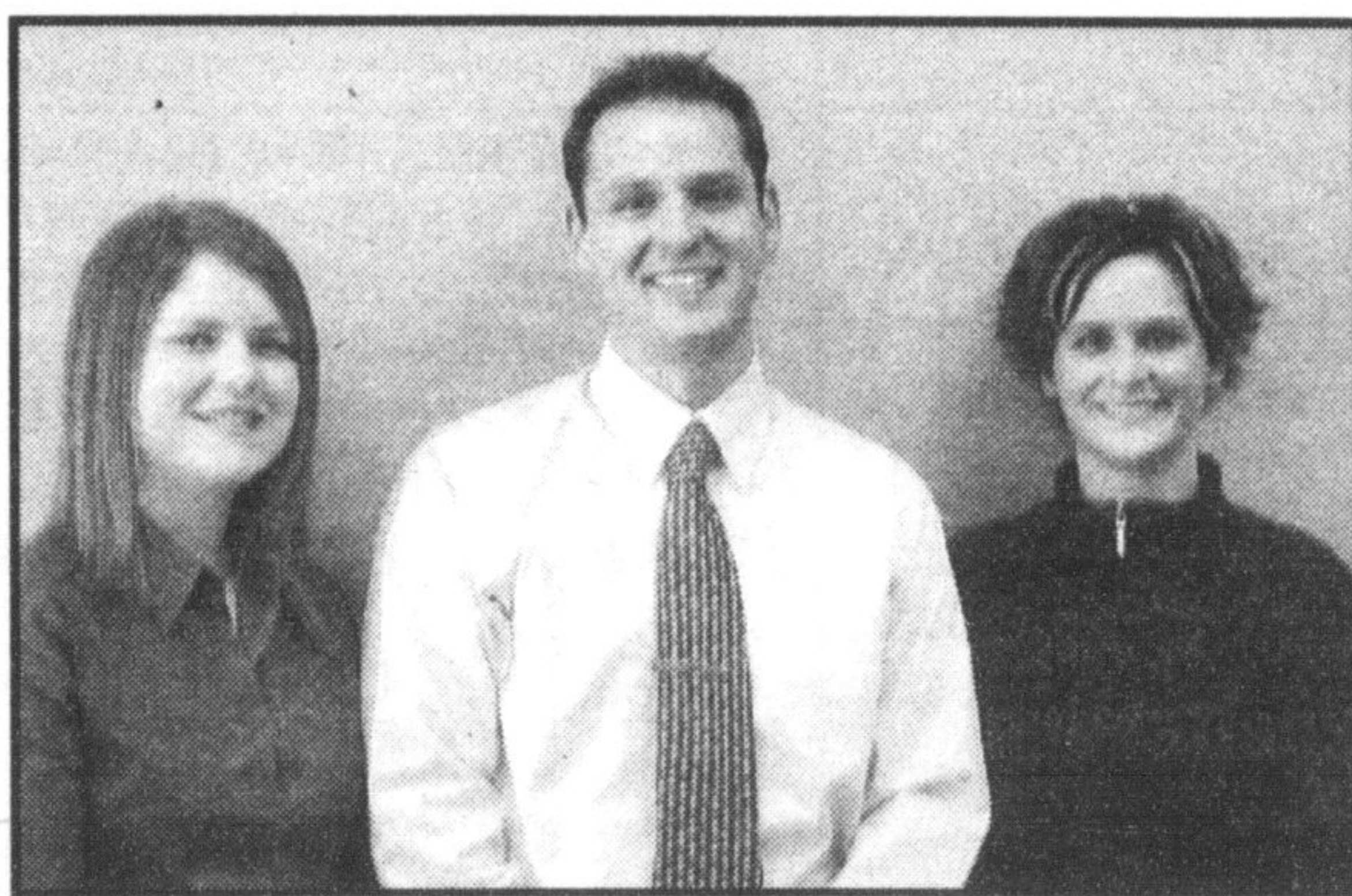
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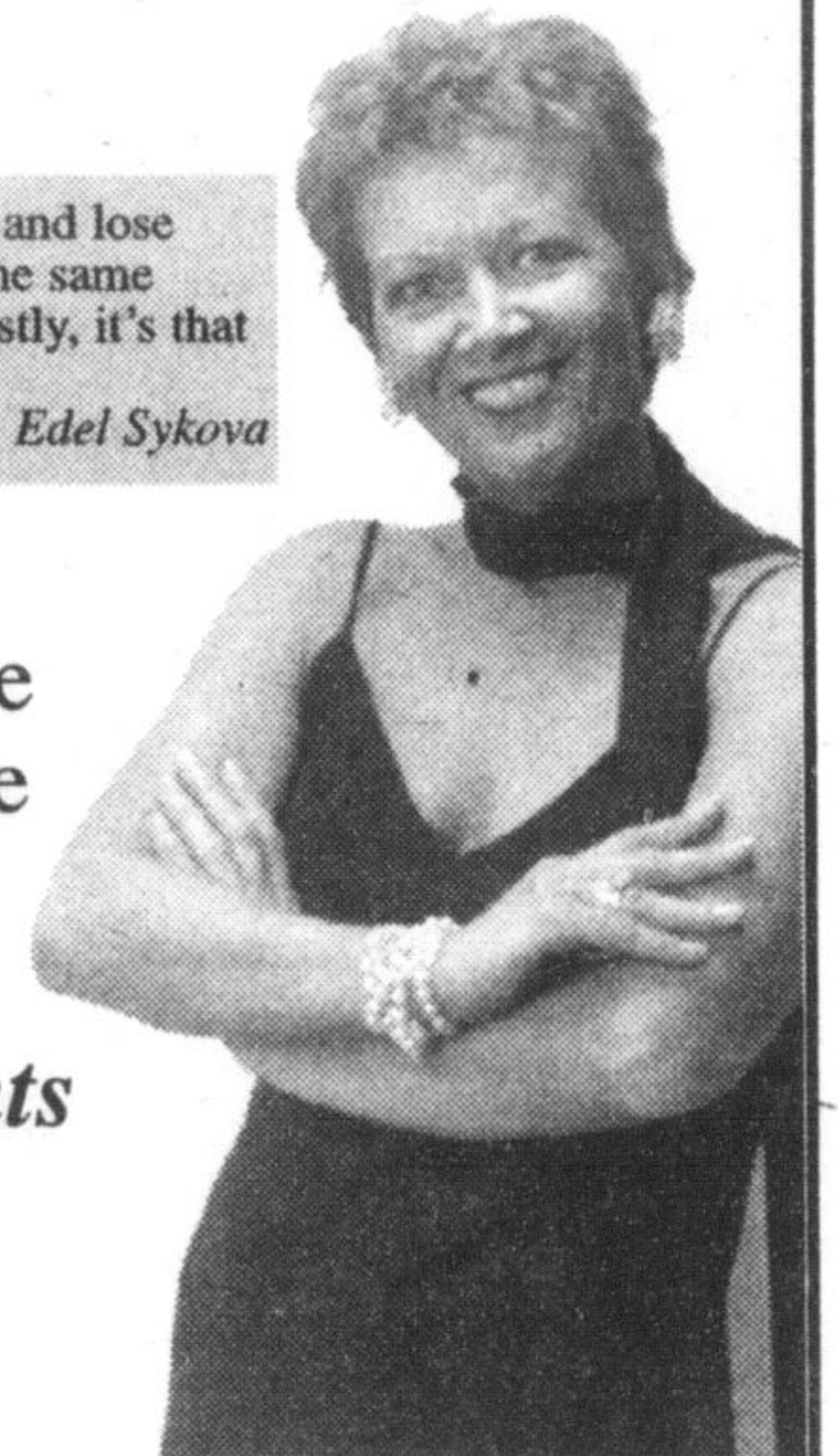


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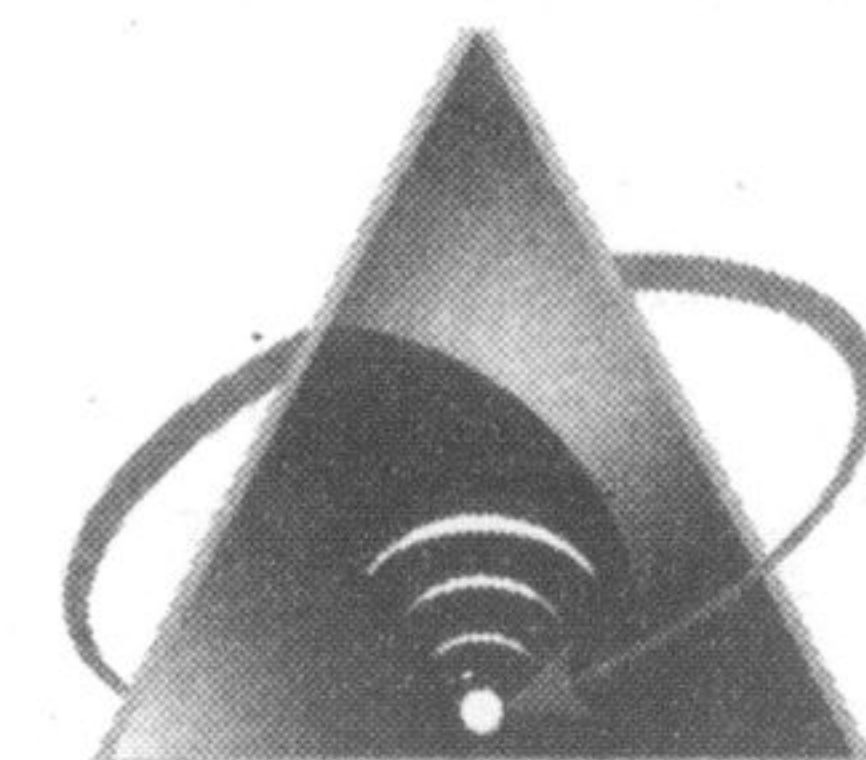
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