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Trustees pay \$54,000 in outside legal fees

By **JASON MISNER**
Special to The Champion

The Halton District School Board has been billed more than \$54,000 by an outside law firm hired by the chair and vice-chair for legal services rendered over a four-month period this year.

A figure of \$54,299.26 in legal fees was made public in a document in the school board's committee of the whole agenda, which was tabled at the November 2 board meeting. The number — which wasn't detailed — was categorized under the heading of "trustee" for the year 2004-05. It was part of a two-page report that showed how much money the board has paid out for legal services since 2001.

The document didn't specify who invoiced the \$54,299.26.

In a Friday (Nov. 4) morning interview, board Chair Paul Tate confirmed the amount was paid to Toronto-based law firm Miller Thomson, but he wouldn't discuss specific payments.

However, The Champion's sister paper, the Burlington Post, has obtained confidential documents that show that Miller Thomson billed that amount for a number of services, ranging from examining the board's operating procedures to addressing a contract for a new education director, between April and August.

In May, Peter Lauwers, from Miller Thomson, was hired by Mr. Tate and vice-chair and Burlington Trustee Peggy Russell to provide his legal opinion about the validity of policy governance at a special board meeting May 16. At the time, some trustees expressed concern a lawyer was hired without discussion at the board table.

Documents show that Miller Thomson billed the board between late April and late June for work around the issues of procedural bylaws and policies.

Also, documents show that Miller Thomson billed the board between mid and late August for work around the issue of a contract for a new education director.

• see **TRUSTEES** on page A3 and related story on page A2

Season's change

Joelle Charbonneau, a ski and snowboard racer with the Milton Heights Racing Club, hopes the leaves will soon be replaced by falling snow as she carries some equipment at the club's annual sale and swap last weekend. The three-day swap and sale at Country Heritage Park will help offset costs of the club's racing program, a new clubhouse and coach development.

Photo by **GRAHAM PAINE**

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