

Suspected arson could be connected with threats, homeowner contends

By LISA TALLYN

Arson is suspected in a fire which caused extensive damage to a house on Town Line in Milton Heights early Tuesday morning.

Halton Regional Police detectives and inspectors from the Ontario Fire Marshal's Office were at the scene, 80 Town Line, for the bulk of the day Tuesday sifting through the charred remains to determine the cause of the blaze.

At press-time officials were still investigating. It is believed the fire started in the kitchen.

Randolph Fretz, owner of the house, was in his home in Saugus, California when the fire started at 3:32 a.m. No one was in the Milton

Heights house at the time of the blaze. Joan Fretz, his mother, called him at 4:30 Tuesday morning to tell him about the fire.

Mr. Fretz said he's suspicious about the cause. The Milton Heights developer says he has received several threats to his life since he became involved in a heated legal battle with the Town of Milton over ownership of the property on which Our Lady of Victory Catholic Church sits. The house which burned is adjacent to the church.

He says he received an anonymous call on New Year's Day while he was at his parents' home. "The caller said 'I want you to

give the church back, or you'll be very sorry."

Mr. Fretz says he reported the call to police.

He says the other threats have been vague rumours which have circulated throughout the village of Milton Heights.

He and his partner, Lee Brading of Milton, took possession of the property in 1987.

"I don't want to say anything until I'm sure that it was arson," said Mr. Fretz in an interview from his home in California. "I have my suspicions."

"I'm coming home tomorrow (Wednesday) and I don't want anyone to go near that place until I've had a chance to investigate."

The fire was discovered by an off-duty volunteer firefighter working in the area Tuesday morning.

Mrs. Fretz says the barking of her dog woke her early Tuesday.

"I looked out my window and saw the fire. I went down the road to see if anything could be salvaged."

Early damage estimates are set by police at \$60,000.

Firefighters were at the scene until 5:45 a.m.

Mr. Fretz says he had sold the house on Monday. All the papers had been signed late that day. The new owners were not to take possession of the house until March.

The house was insured, but Mr. Fretz is not sure of his current legal position.



This abandoned house on Mill St. was gutted by fire Monday night. Officials believe the fire may have been set intentionally.

Motorists should be prepared for any winter emergency

Every year, the first snowfall seems to take Ontario drivers by surprise. This year, however, by preparing ahead, motorists can ensure safe driving throughout the winter.

Having your car properly tuned and fluid levels checked is the most important step. The gas tank level should be at least half-full in cold weather to avoid gas-line freezing, resulting in stalling.

Snow tires should be used if the car is not equipped with all-season

radials to alleviate slipping on snow and ice.

A kit containing ice scraper, shovel, booster cables, flares, blankets and a first-aid kit should be stored in the trunk.

When parking, run the car back and forth to make a track that will make it easier to get out later. Allow ample space between cars.

During rough weather conditions, headlights should be on at all times and windows kept clear of snow and ice.

Conservation authority changes could cost town

By ROB KELLY

Milton politicians endorsed a stiff rebuke of provincial plans to change conservation authorities, Monday night at municipal council. Halton Region Conservation Authority general manager Murray Stephen says that grassroots opposition is spreading across Ontario.

Mr. Stephen encouraged local politicians to make their concerns known right to the top of the provincial government. The issues are of such concern and so widespread they will move beyond the realm of individual government ministries, Mr. Stephen indicated. "We feel this report is going to require cabinet-level decisions."

In June a review of the conservation authorities was released by Vince Kerrio, minister of natural resources. By March municipalities must respond to the report's recommendations. Thus, Mr. Stephen's presence at town hall Monday, to fuel condemnation of a Queen's Park study which he feels deeply erodes the mandate of conservation authorities.

In Milton planning director Bob Zsadanyi he had a staunch ally. Council adopted Mr. Zsadanyi's report, which presented a range of concerns over lower grants to conservation authorities, diminished membership on authority boards for smaller centres and decreased responsibility for bodies such as HRCA.

Mr. Zsadanyi said if the provincial study is adopted, Halton Hills and Milton will be whittled down to one representative each on the authority board, rather than the current two.

"That is simply not acceptable." He called the proposal "incredible," especially when one considers the bulk of local authority land is in those two municipalities.

Also, Mr. Zsadanyi said, the province advocates "substantial cut-backs in funding as it relates to HRCA," which will shift "the burden of payment to the local municipality."

He considered this fundamentally unfair when one views how local resorts such as Glen Eden are used. The majority of those enjoying such parks are from out of town, Mr. Zsadanyi said.

Mr. Stephen said a proposed cut-back in provincial funding for water projects from 55 per cent to 50 per cent means the largest programs administered by the authority will have to be further sponsored by municipal tax dollars. Water programs include such efforts as dam building and eat up the biggest share of authority capital.

In 1988, HRCA had \$3 million in capital projects go unfunded because of provincial restraints, Mr. Stephen said, and a further \$27 million worth of work is stalled for similar reasons across Ontario.

"Long term we've got a lot of

capital projects deferred that are going to come on slate. The longer they're delayed, the more expensive they tend to be."

Overall, Ontario's conservation authorities receive approximately \$42 million, and need between \$55 million and \$60 million to carry out existing programs, Mr. Stephen said.

There is also a push to whittle administrative funding from 55 per cent to 50 per cent by the province, Mr. Stephen said, a move he opposes.

While admitting some conservation boards, with perhaps 50 members, would not suffer from a reduction in membership, Mr. Stephen said that was not the case in Halton, which has 19 members. He favours three members for all municipalities between 10,000 and 100,000 residents and four for larger centres.

Mr. Stephen said he was "very disappointed," in the provincial report, which was initiated after a call from the conservation authorities for increased funding, more board members and a possible amalgamation of some authorities.

Rather than dealing with the pressing issues at hand, Mr. Stephen said, the "government deflected" them and "created a controversy."

Mr. Stephen estimated discussions on the report would continue through 1989.



Photo by JOHN WARREN

Former customers of West End Meat Market can head back to the shop at 140 Main St. The grand reopening was held Saturday after the business was closed in March, 1987 when the premises was damaged

by fire. Working behind the counter are from left, Jennifer Flannagan, Carlo Vimini, Bob Taylor, Mike Moar and Susan Taylor. New owners of the business are Bob and Susan Taylor.

House may have been torched

Arson is suspected in an abandoned house fire on Mill St. Monday evening.

A Halton Regional Police officer notified the fire department of the blaze in the house at 151 Mill St. at 9:07 p.m., when he noticed smoke coming from a building adjacent to Jackson's Barn.

Firefighters from Central and No. 3 stations responded. The house was gutted.

Deputy Fire Chief Harold Penson says the blaze started in a mattress on the second floor of the house. Fire spread across the floor, to the walls and roof.

The house was boarded up except for a rear door. Police said at the scene that youths had reportedly been in the house over the past weekend.

No damage estimate has been set.

FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAMS
THE HALTON BOARD OF EDUCATION

Information meetings are being held to explain Grade 1 and Grade 7 French Immersion programs, starting in September, 1989.

CORRECTION

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| ACTON— | Tuesday, January 10, 1989 7:30 p.m. Robert Little Public School 41 School Lane |
| GEORGETOWN— | Wednesday, January 11, 1989 7:30 p.m. Georgetown Kennedy Public School 75 Weber Drive |
| MILTON— | Wednesday, January 11, 1989 7:00 p.m. Martin St. Public School 184 Martin Street |

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