

Says new chairman Penman

# HRCA's recreation-intensive facilities a plus

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For example, it's alright to climb the sheer rock face at Rattlesnake Point, although it has been somewhat controversial over the years.

A climbing season doesn't go by without some sort of serious accident, and there have been deaths. But the climbers accept the risks and sign waivers to that effect, the HRCA chairman pointed out, and a strong demand exists to climb the cliff, with accomplished devotees coming from as far away as Michigan to do it.

In an example of an activity that Mr. Penman seemed to find a tad more perplexing in terms of its appeal, the chairman cited the fact that the authority also permits snowmobile enthusiasts to race around Kelso Lake during the summer. The speed of the machines usually keeps them afloat.

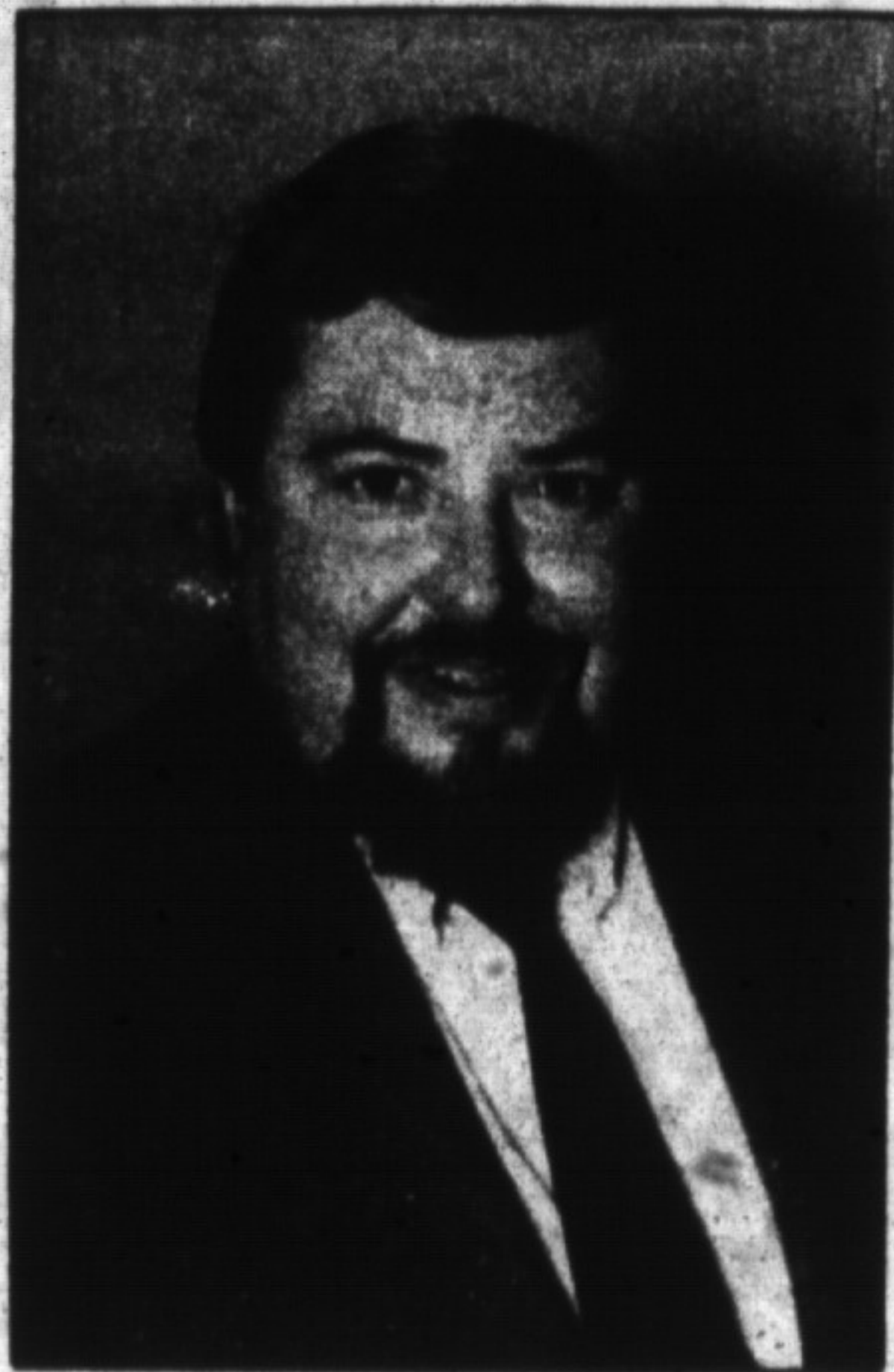
### No hand gliding

But hang gliding on authority lands has been banned, following a demonstration for board representatives in which a fellow strapped one on and promptly did what amounted to a half-gainer off a hill due to a lack of supporting winds — thankfully without serious consequence beyond embarrassment.

The daring and the quixotic are far from the main thrust of authority planning, however. That revolves around cost effectively managing high-volume recreational programs like the Glen Eden ski facilities within the Kelso complex in rural Milton. Mr. Penman calls the ski hill one of the authority's "jewels".

"It's an absolutely wonderful facility. We've invested about \$1.5 million in snowmaking (equipment). We can guarantee 90 to 105 days of recreational skiing (a year), almost regardless of the weather."

The money for state of the art snowmaking machinery is returned as revenue over and above expenditures (not profit — the HRCA is a non-profit agency) every two seasons or so. Glen Eden generates a surplus of about \$800,000 per



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year. It goes back into ski operations, and reserve funds to be used for expansions, which will probably include a chalet and possibly even additional ski runs.

But the conservation authority as a whole, despite its \$8.3 million capital budget, has been feeling the financial pinch over the last few years, like most government agencies. "We sure as hell are not" flush with cash, Mr. Penman said.

### A hot potato

That led to a series of political skirmishes over the past two years with both the provincial government and Halton Region, a war of words which Mr. Penman, who was often the point man expressing authority ire, hopes has ended.

In a nutshell, the provincial government cut back funding to the HRCA and told the authority to get the shortfall from

Halton. Halton balked.

The three played hot potato, with the authority threatening to take both parties to court. In the end Halton and Queen's Park more or less split the difference.

"The Region made its point," Mr. Penman allowed Monday. Things have been much calmer since, he noted, and this year the HRCA got "a modest increase" in funding from Halton — about three per cent.

In what is perhaps an example of the financial skittishness that still prevails, the authority is jockeying with provincial authorities over the fate of Bronte Creek provincial park in Oakville. It's a provincial facility that has turned into something more like the operations the HRCA manages.

As Mr. Penman explained it, the Province favours parks that don't have a lot of bells and whistles — mostly just natural attributes. Ontario isn't keen on overseeing facilities that are "recreation-intensive", with pools, skating rinks, farm exhibits and the like. But that kind of thing fits in nicely to the HRCA plan, he added.

### Bronte Creek in limbo

However, the authority is taking a wait-and-see attitude, because Bronte Creek runs at a loss and, despite the fact 300,000 people flow through a year, the authority would have to look at changing some things to make it break even. Overnight camping might be permitted, for example, but all that has to be studied before the HRCA agrees to take over the complex, Mr. Penman said.

"I think they (Queen's Park) hope we will be in a position to talk about taking it over this summer," Mr. Penman said. "That's obviously premature."

Although the authority operates parks with man-made, or at least managed, attractions, such as ski hills and reservoir-type lakes, conservation is key and commercialism is not even a distant temptation, Mr. Penman said. "We've never done it yet." There will be no "Coney Island" type facilities in the HRCA system, or anything similar, he stressed.

"There's a little bit of marketing, but it's tastefully done."

## Agriculture finds its voice

"Who Speaks for Agriculture" is the theme of a public forum sponsored by the Halton Region Federation of Agriculture next Wednesday night.

The discussion at Bishop Reding Secondary School will address the subjects: "Can agriculture influence the media?", and "From Farm Field to Kitchen Table: A Communica-

tions Breakdown."

The guest speakers will include Jeff Wilson of Agricultural Groups Concerned about Resources and the Environment, Roy Maxwell of the Ontario Chicken Producers' Marketing Board, and Ross Daily, agricultural broadcaster and writer with CFPL-TV. The event will be held from 8-10 p.m.

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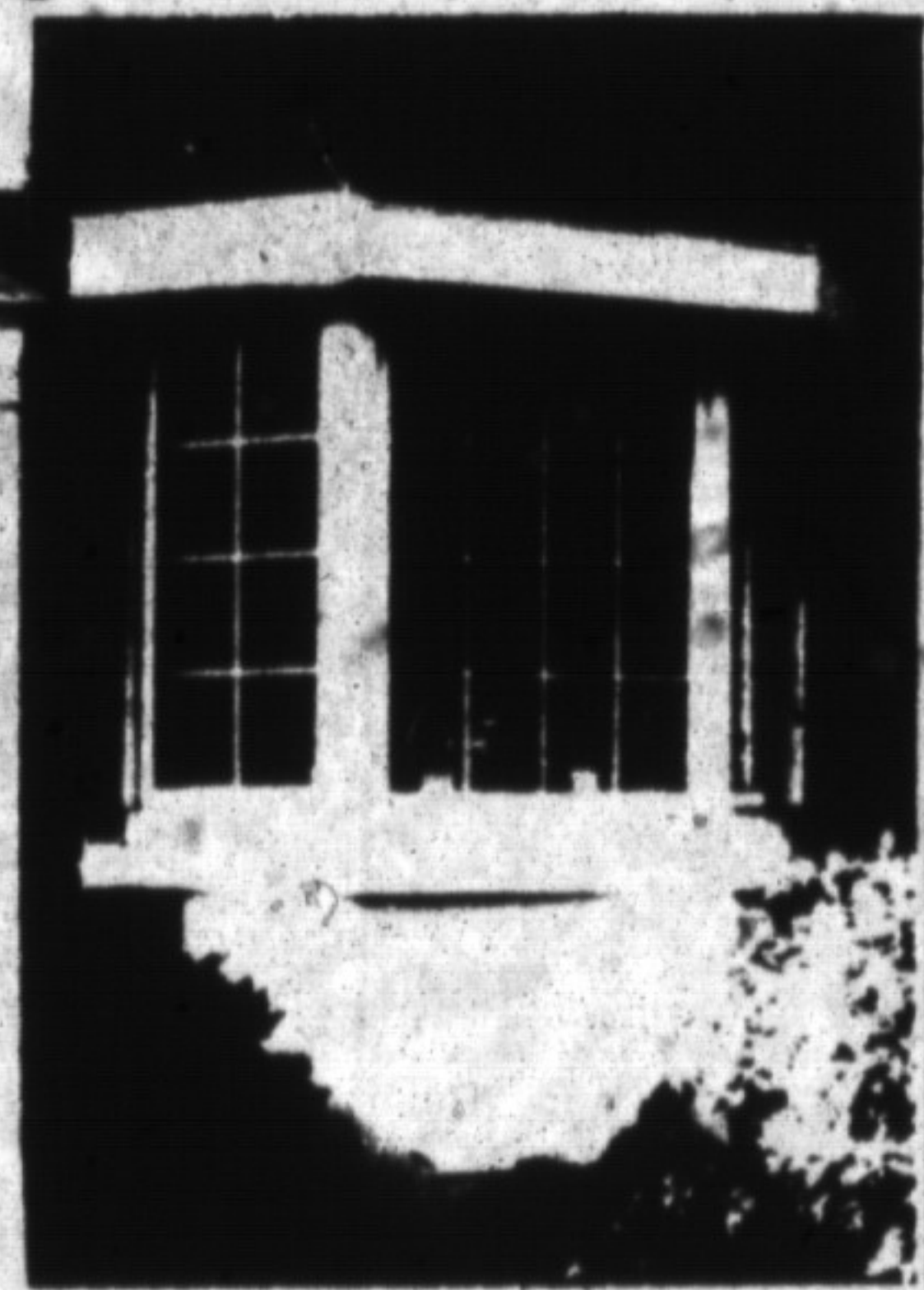
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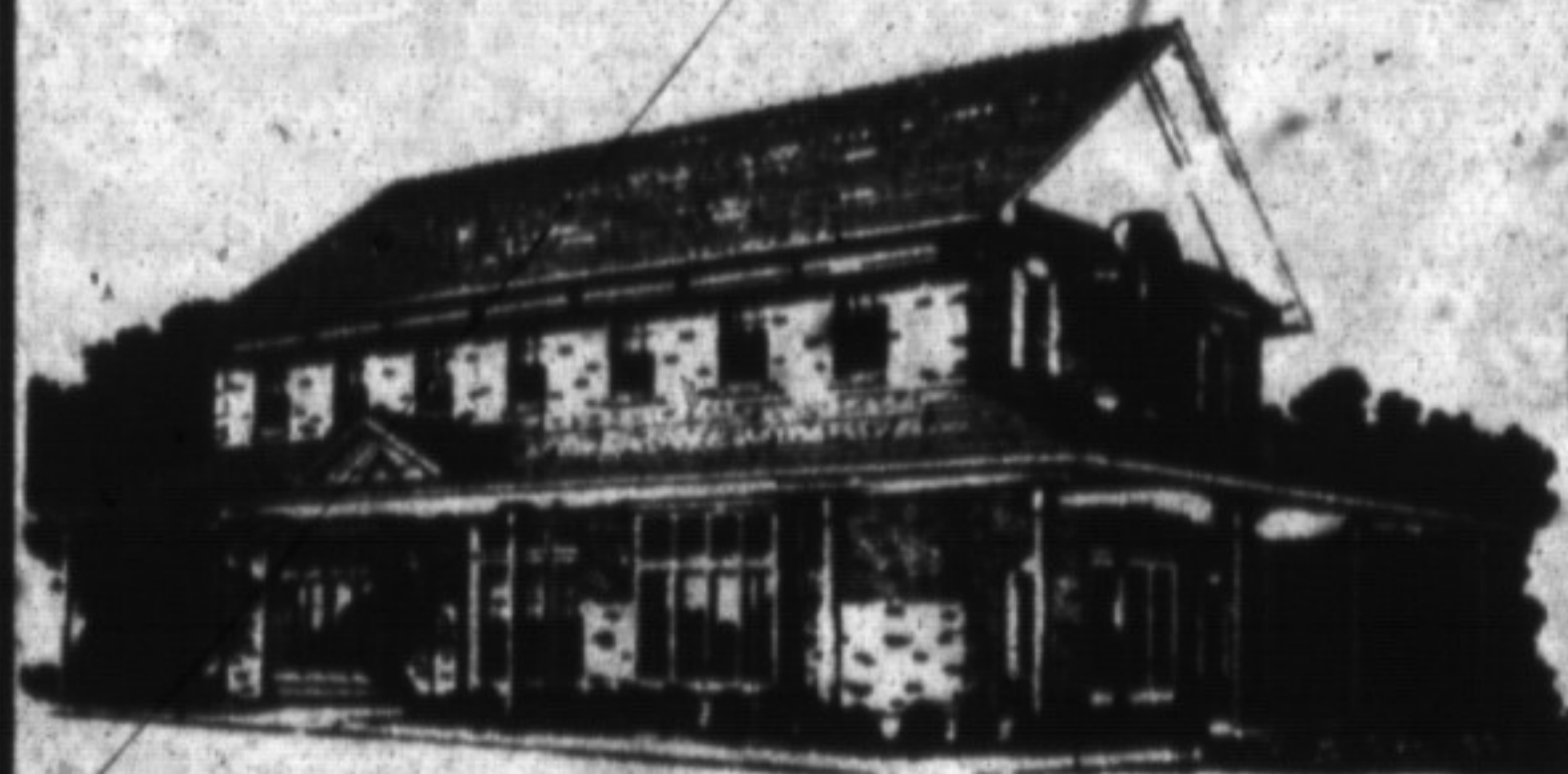


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