

COMMENT

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LOOKING BACK



Junior fireman certificates were handed out by the Milton Fire Brigade in May of 1961 to scores of children who were at the fire station bright and early one Saturday. Deputy Chief George Bundy (right) and Bob Pearson (left) gave certificates to (from left) Barbara Colo, Keltie Calman, and Donna Lea Devlin. The children also received passes to the Roxy Theatre.

More control needed

The best thing that could happen to the Halton Regional Police Service, as its now called, would be for it to come under more direct control by elected officials, that is, Halton regional councillors.

We realize some people are dead set against this, with what they honestly see as extremely valid reservations. One of them is Oakville councillor Fred Oliver, a former deputy police chief and police commissioner.

Mr. Oliver fears more direct control over police operations by politicians would lead to an increased risk of political interference in what is now a largely autonomous force. He recently said such was the case about 40 years ago in Ontario, when politicians did have more say and sway in police matters.

Presently the police chief and his close subordinates run the day-to-day operations of the force, under the supervision of what is, in Halton at least, a five-member civilian police services board.

It is the civilian board that by and large has the major say in police operations, and only two of its members are elected — the two regional councillors on the panel. The other three are appointed. That's not to diminish the latter's roles or efforts, but it does mean they aren't as directly accountable to the people as the two politicians are.

The push in government at all levels is toward increased public accountability. As a matter of fact, politicians in Halton have for some time been pressing for more authority over police. It appears to be a trend across Ontario. A provincially appointed committee has been touring various towns and cities seeking input for proposed changes.

It's probably true, as Oakville Mayor Ann Mulvale recently suggested, that even if politicians do gain more of a role in police matters their hands will still be tied on a number of important issues. That's because the province, wisely, has already indicated it has no plans to allow politicians to tinker with what are deemed essential police expenditures.

But there will be some areas where the political process, the truly democratic process, comes more to the fore, and that's all to the good.

We have been impressed with many of the initiatives undertaken by Halton Regional Police — their prominent place in race relations evolution and push toward community policing are two examples that come to mind. These changes have come from the top of the force, from Chief James Harding, and are to be applauded.

But we also know that Chief Harding at times struggles with the political role that is, probably unfairly, forced upon him. He has clashed with elected officials. He has at times been confrontational instead of compromising.

This is to be expected in the police business, where confrontation necessarily forms a big part of the work and compromise usually means deviance from high standards.

Many of the same attributes that can make a person an excellent police officer are liabilities in the political arena. The two theatres of operations are almost mutually exclusive. Good police officers develop clear-cut plans and drive toward them stressing hierarchal management, conformity, and plainly defined goals.

In politics agendas change, priorities evolve, consensus is nearly impossible and, in a democracy at least, any hint of hierarchal management usually draws howls of derision from opposing political groups, thankfully.

It's unfair to cast police officers of any rank into politics to a large degree. It's not where they belong. And people currently think it's also unjust that their elected officials don't have more control over the major police political issue, budgeting. So, the sooner the political and police camps are distanced, the better.

PAGES OF THE PAST

One Year Ago

From the June 12, 1991 issue

□ A computer systems manager at Milton District Hospital felt she was being made the scapegoat in a controversy sparked by a report that criticized operations at a Milton youth detention centre. Naomi Ridgeway said she was not the only one who had been critical of operations at the Casatta Youth Centre, a holding facility for youths who are in trouble with the law. Mrs. Ridgeway said the other six members of a committee she served on were of a similar opinion regarding the Milton Casatta centre — that it was in "very poor condition," both structurally and in terms of necessary housekeeping.

□ Milton's second major house fire in nine days left a Willow Avenue family homeless. Members of the Fascinato family, who lived in the house for 20 years, were at home at the time of the 2:45 a.m. blaze, but escaped without injury. A neighbour heard a small explosion and discovered the garage of the house engulfed in flames, according to Halton Regional Police which were investigating the fire. Mike Fascinato, 52, was awoken by screaming neighbours and a motorist who stopped to help. Only the front of the house was left intact.

□ The amount of the donation to the leisure centre campaign generated at the Jamaica Sizzle was simmering on the back burner, and all organizers could say was the event went very well. The dinner and dance was expected to raise \$10,000. More than 800 people attended the party along with Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, Lincoln Alexander, and Jamaican Council General Kay Baxter.

20 Years Ago

From the June 14, 1972 issue

□ Three tenders for municipal projects totalling \$1,146,161 were accepted by Milton Council, subject to required provincial approvals. The major project was the addition to the town's sewage treatment plant, which was being labelled a water pollution control plant. The tender of K. H. Preston Construction Ltd. of Weston was approved on recommendation of the engineers Duncan, Hooper and Associates.

□ Victory smiles at reaching the pinnacle after six years of charity auction work turned into a bitter taste in the mouths of members of the Optimist Club of Milton, in the matter of a few hours. The day's auction receipts totalling \$1,222 were stolen some time early in the evening, from under the eyes of the remaining organizers and buyers. The theft mocked months of hard work and preparation by the Optimist Club and other volunteers.

50 Years Ago

From the June 11, 1942 issue

□ Milton, it was claimed, had one of the most beautiful and best kept cemeteries in the province. The credit went to the caretaker, George White.

□ Eight Streetsville merchants were fined a total of \$950 for operating slot machines.

□ John G. Irving of Second Line in Esquesing Township brought a branch of a cherry tree to the Champion office. It was loaded with fruit, and at one end had a bunch of blossoms.

PUD

BY STEVE NEASE

