

HOME EXPRESSIONS HOME

Ontario Hydro offers incentives for heat pump users

Thinking of installing a heat pump? Depending on where you live, you may qualify for an Ontario Hydro incentive of between \$500 and \$2,000. Since Hydro began offering the incentives in May 1990, more than 3,200 people have received cheques, says Julie Mitchell, Senior Supervisor, Existing Homes, for Ontario Hydro.

"The incentives are available to homeowners who used at least 50 per cent electric heat over the past year, and live in areas (or have purchased a new home) where natural gas is not available," said Mitchell. "To be eligible, the dealer, installation and equipment used must meet criteria set by Ontario Hydro."

If you have electric heating, installing a heat pump can save you between 30 and 65 per cent on your heating costs. Some models of heat pumps can also be connected to the water heater and will reduce your hot water bills by up to 50 per cent.

Heat pumps create a more comfortable interior climate. In winter, heat pumps work by extracting heat from outside the home and transferring it inside. Even when the temperature outside is below freezing, there is still a great deal of heat in the air. All heat pumps have a back-up heating system to assist on extremely cold days. During the summer months, heat pumps de-humidify and provide central air conditioning. Air conditioning is provided by reversing the process with a simple switching mechanism. It works much like a refrigerator which extracts heat from the inside of the unit and releases it to the outside through the coils at the back," Mitchell said.

When an air-to-air heat pump is installed with an electric furnace, or installed as one unit with an electric back-up, heating costs will be up to 30 per cent lower than if electric heating is used alone. A survey by Ontario Hydro found that 80 per cent of heat pump owners said they would buy a heat pump for their next house.

Ground-source heat pumps have a heat collecting fluid circulating through pipes in the ground. The natural radiant heat of the earth is extracted by the heat pump. According to Hydro's Mitchell, more than 2,100 ground-source heat pump installations have qualified for Hydro's heat pump incentive programs.

Because it harnesses natural energy from the earth, the ground source heat pump has a low impact on the environment. Its operating efficiency also makes it an attractive option. Ground-source heat pumps also come with a third-party, five-year warranty, backed by the Canadian Earth Energy Association.

A water-source heat pump can be

used for properties with a well that is able to provide a sufficient flow of water. In this case, the water is drawn up directly to the pump's heat exchanger, where the heat is extracted. Both ground and water-source heat pumps can cut electric heating bills by as much as 65 per cent.

The bivalent heat pump is an air-to-air heat pump combined with a small, high-efficiency propane-fired furnace in one unit. (It is also available for natural gas, but Ontario Hydro incentives do not apply in areas with natural gas.) Since the burner component of a

bivalent heat pump is located outside the house, no chimney is necessary.

The unit works like the other heat pumps — for about 80 per cent of heating needs, the heat pump does the job, while the burner component takes over for the coldest days, usually about 20 per cent of the heating season.

Up to 35 per cent could be cut from an electric heating bill with a bivalent heat pump.

The more efficient the heat pump, the more it costs. The incentives for qualified customers range from \$500

for air source, \$1,000 for bivalent and \$2,000 for ground-source. Ontario Hydro also offers financing, currently at 2 per cent below the prime rate. About five per cent of applicants take

advantage of the financing option, which could knock almost \$5,000 off the price of financing a ground-source heat pump at regular interest rates over five years.

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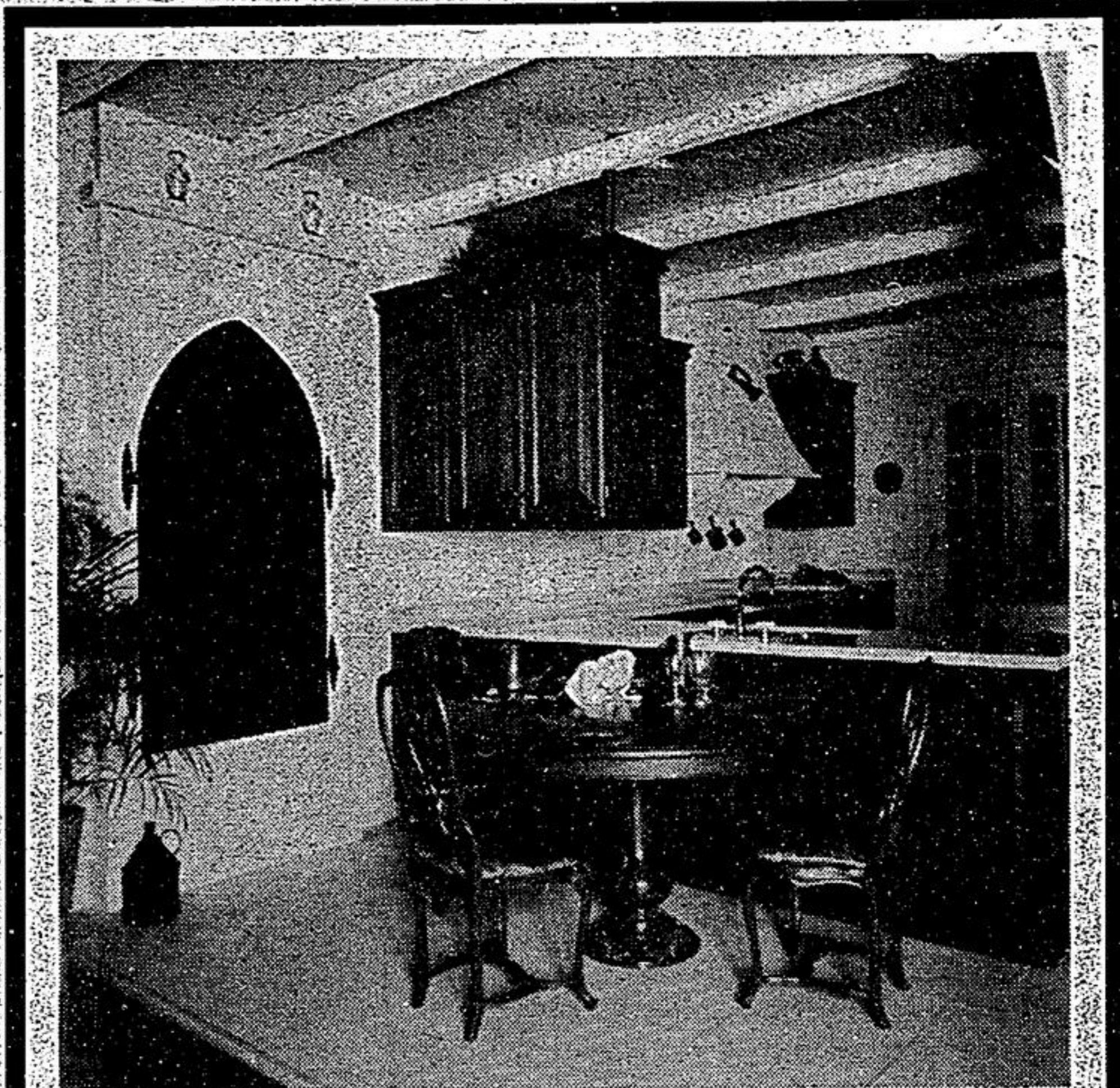
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