

Young lawyers eager to be prosecutors

By ALEX MATHESON

Being a dynamo of strength or a tireless runner aren't prerequisites, but being able to endure stress and hard work are characteristics needed for the ever more popular job of criminal prosecutor.

Most come to the prosecutor's job at a young age, said Halton Crown Attorney Jim Treleaven, and it is a young man's job. When they leave, it is usually for a more lucrative private practice made possible as a result of experience as a prosecutor. However, said Treleaven, the stress can make the change necessary.

It takes about five years experience for a prosecutor to learn all facets of the crown attorney's role well, he said. In past years, many left the field after only two or three years. Now, however, only one of Halton's four assistant crown attorneys has less than five years experience in the region and he is close to five, said Treleaven.

The length of stay now is approaching five to 10 years, before a move on to private practice or the bench is contemplated, he added. One of the reasons prosecutor has become such a sought-after job is that there is a surplus of lawyers and resultant difficulty in setting up a practice. The increasing popularity of the prosecutor's job among young lawyers is a phenomenon of about the last five years.

Most prosecutors come to the job at 25 or 26 years of age, after two or three years of experience, following law school, said Treleaven. And with the number who want to get into the field, the crown's office gets the best graduates.

Starting pay is \$27,000 for an assistant crown attorney, with the top level crown attorney earning about \$67,000.

In Halton, the crown attorney, four assistant crown attorneys and 10 part-time crown attorneys handle about 7,200 charges a year. Although there is no serious backlog in trials here, crown attorneys could use more time for preparation before serious cases, said Treleaven. They probably lose some cases they could win if they had more time, he admitted.

Our legal system puts the onus on the crown to prove the guilt of the accused beyond a reasonable doubt, while the defence has only to raise a reasonable doubt. Most crown cases are essentially prepared by the police.

The defence just has to wait and hope the crown makes a mistake that can be exploited, said Treleaven. From that point of view, defence is easier, he said.

But one of the drawbacks of being a defence lawyer is frequently having clients you don't like. The crown, as the lawyer for the public or the victim, doesn't have this liability.

However, the nature of the prosecutor's job can make one jaded toward certain segments of the population. It is easy, he said, to get in a state of mind such that you think all teenagers are bad. To combat this feeling, Treleaven makes a point of going to high schools to reassure himself that it is only the small minority of teenagers who are bad. It's therapeutic, he explained.

In the past, society has tended to view the defence lawyer as the good guy upholding the rights of the accused against the might

of the state. However, that attitude has shifted to one showing less sympathy for the law breaker.

This shift also shows up in the motivation of some people wishing to become prosecutors. Some people, said Treleaven, genuinely want to rid society of criminals.

As a group, prosecutors in Ontario handle about twice as many matters as those in other provinces. For Ontario, 1,200 cases per prosecutor annually is normal, he said. But in Halton the figure is higher.

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Crown attorney Jim Treleaven says stamina and ability to work under stress are important for a prosecutor. As a result, it is a young man's job. Each of Halton's assistant crown prosecutors handle about 1,200 cases a year. This exceeds the provincial average, which in itself is twice the national average. Photo by Alex Matheson.

Household Hints

From Pauline McKeally



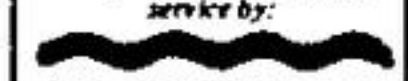
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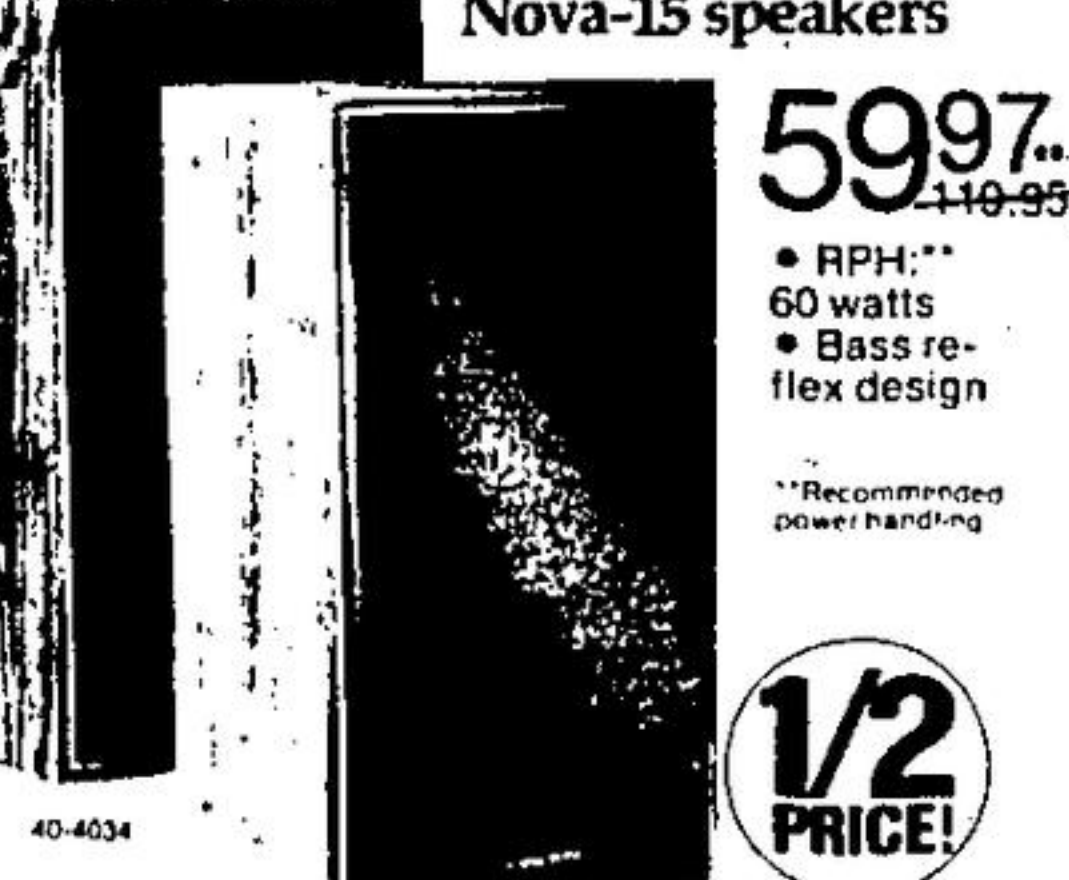
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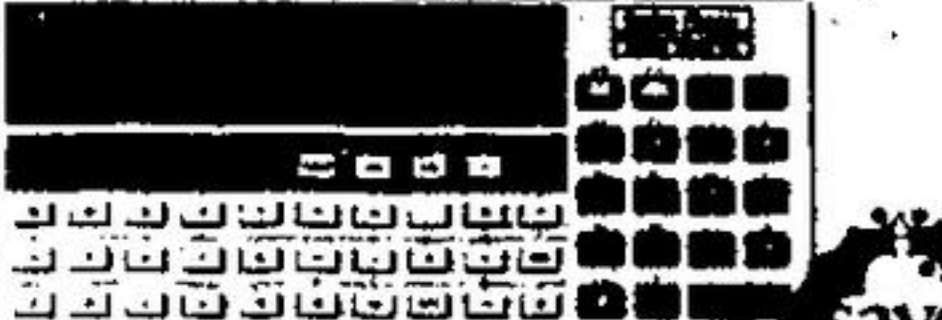
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