

Vandalism thrives on public apathy: Eadie

By PAUL DORSEY
Herald staff writer

Local vandals and thieves find plenty of ideal accomplices among the apathetic homeowners who either leave belongings scattered around their yards or else witness neighborhood crimes and fail to summon police, according to Sergeant Dave Eadie.

A 20-year veteran of police work, the Halton regional police sergeant told members of the Georgetown Area Ratepayers Association (GARA) last Wednesday that local authorities would have a much easier job curbing vandalism and theft here if law-abiding citizens would tip them off when they see such crimes taking place.

All too often, however, citizens see vandals causing damage in their neighborhood and refuse to take a moment and summon police because they are reluctant to get involved, Sergeant Eadie said.

Claiming extensive police experience from his native Glasgow to Oakville to north Halton, Sergeant Eadie called vandalism "the physical evidence of frustration usually found among the younger members of our community."

"It's a social disease, they tell me, that's caused by the affluent society of today," he said. "Well, I don't believe it, and I hope you don't either."

Sergeant Eadie recalled that as a young boy, he was caught by police while involved in some mischief and promptly dragged home to his parents, who would immediately dole out swift physical punishment even before they had heard what he'd done.

Today, however, if a policeman escorts a mischievous youth or vandal home to his parents, Sergeant Eadie said, it is often the policeman who receives the lashing, albeit a verbal one from the parents, who are more concerned about their neighbors' reaction to seeing a cruiser in the driveway.

"The culprits are not just the kids," Sergeant Eadie contended. "It's you and I, especially if you're a parent!"

Another worthwhile suggestion for the prevention of theft and burglary, he added, is to closely examine your own home for all possible means of break-in, just as a thief would do, and then take steps to seal off those points of access.

When leaving home on holiday, he reminded listeners, make sure newspaper delivery is discontinued, remove all other signs that the house is empty and leave a key and instructions with neighbors in case some mishap or crime occurs.

Felding questions from the audience, Sergeant Eadie admitted that a "very low" percentage of vandals are caught by authorities. The suggestion that newspapers should be allowed to print the names of convicted vandals may well be having a detrimental effect on crime in some areas of the U.S., he said, but the practice is simply not allowed in Canada, especially since many vandals are 16 years of age and under, considered juveniles by law and their identities protected.

Saturday's police auction at the Georgetown headquarters, Sergeant Eadie noted, offered more than 50 bicycles for sale, many of which were confiscated from thieves but never reclaimed by their original owners. A good way of ensuring that your property can be recovered if stolen, he suggested, is to have police visit your home with a "vibra-pen", or else purchase one yourself at a minimal cost in electronic appliance stores.

The special pen is used to engrave valuable household items with readily identifiable information so that, once recovered by police, the items can quickly be returned to the owners. Engraving social insurance numbers of an inconspicuous area of each valuable item is one of the better ideas, Sergeant Eadie said.

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APATHY REASON

"The reason vandalism flourishes is apathy," he said at the well-attended meeting. "Your police force is only as good as you make it; we need your help to help you. If you see damage being done, don't just shrug it off because it's not my kid and it's not my property. Pick up the phone and report it."

Sergeant Eadie reminded listeners that vandalism is costing them money to finance police work and bear the "astronomical" cost of repairing public facilities that are attacked by vandals. Damage to school buildings and grounds, which are among the most popular targets, cost the Halton Board of Education, and thus the taxpayers, "well above \$300,000" last year, he estimated.

Sergeant Eadie said Howard Wrigglesworth Public School, where the GARA meeting was held, has heavy screens covering the large auditorium windows to protect against damage, even though the school is situated on Highway 7, the community's busiest thoroughfare.

Local taxpayers also had to pick up the tab for repainting Georgetown's water tower, which was recently defaced by vandals armed with cans of spray paint, he recalled. The tower itself is located near the busy Highway 7-Mountainview Road intersection.

EFFECTIVE WAYS

Although he was at a loss to suggest effective ways of stopping vandalism, Sergeant Eadie implored members of the audience to assist the "two or three" policemen who are patrolling Georgetown on an average night by reporting vandalism and other crimes quickly and without hesitation.

Vandals have been known to cause damage and then wait to see how long it takes for police to arrive on the scene, he said, invariably carrying their destructive impulses further if authorities do not appear.

Sergeant Eadie advised citizens to phone the parents of the vandals if they happen to recognize them and know their families. Then, if the parents take no action, call the police, he said.

Vandals can be discouraged the same as thieves and other prowlers by ensuring that the exteriors of homes and yards are well-lighted, Sergeant Eadie added. Because they are "cowards," vandals will rarely approach a property which does not offer them the advantage of darkness, he explained.

Sergeant Eadie also took aim at neighborhood thieves, complaining that anyone who

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May 24 police commission meets here

Halton Regional Police commission will be holding its next meeting May 24 in the Halton Hills council chambers on Trafalgar Road.

The meeting last Thursday was held in the town offices in Milton. The change in location of the meetings is part of the commission's recent decision to become more visible in the different parts of the region.

The commission decided to alternate its meeting between Burlington and Oakville, with a number of meetings being held in the different areas in the north during the year.

The meeting is scheduled for 2 p.m., and members of the public are free to attend the public portion of the meeting. Items dealing with security or personnel matters are discussed in camera.

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