

Simple— just call the police

Last Friday I was in Hornby experiencing déjà vu while photographing a team of Halton Police officers as they dismantled a marijuana grow-op.

Why déjà vu? Eleven years ago, I was invited to cover a similar grow-op bust, in a wetland, northwest of Acton.

At the time, Halton Police brought in a helicopter to spot the marijuana from the air, as its colour stands out against the other vegetation in marshy wetlands.

Both raids were similar, in that we had to walk through a maze of vegetation and underbrush to get to the plants.

At the Acton raid, the plants were in pots, indicating they had been started in pots elsewhere, then set out in the wetland, letting Mother Nature take over.

At the time, I was struck with the simplicity of that operation— set out the potted plants and return a few months later to harvest.

But Friday's raid showed me how sophisticated the illegal pot-growing business has become in the past 11 years.

Members of the media were led in through a winding hidden path, to see the plots, all of which were encircled by a thickly-treed border. I was struck how those who had planted this marijuana had gone to great lengths to set up this grow.

In the areas where there was no pot growing, the weeds and goldenrod stood more than four feet tall. Where the pot was growing, the soil looked like it had been plowed or tilled in some manner, before planting.

Yup, I said planting— not pre-planted pots in this grow— all of these plants had been transplanted in nice straight rows.

Around the plots were a number of big drums and rubber hoses, which had been used for irrigating the plots. These guys had obviously brought in a generator to run the water pump which filled the water drums from a nearby creek. There is no power outlet nearby.

Simply put, the place looked like a well-organized market garden for marijuana.

Ted Brown



There were numerous plastic containers of liquid fertilizer— some still half-full— which had been left behind.

It was incredibly sophisticated and organized— someone had put a lot of time and effort into this plot. Sophisticated as it was, there was one more factor— all of this work had been done in the middle of the night.

The sound of the generator would be drowned out by nearby Hwy. 401 traffic, the barrels had been carried in by hand, and whatever equipment was used to till the land also had to be manually hauled in, all under the cover of darkness.

Friday afternoon, there was a breeze, the sun was shining and the weather was quite pleasant as the drug cops hauled out an estimated \$1.5 million in pot.

I thought of what that same area would be like in mid-July, with intense humid heat and the swarms of mosquitoes and black flies. It'd be one helluva place to work, tilling the soil and planting the pot- even more so in the dark.

Pot growers are resourceful. They scan Google Earth to locate out-of-the-way areas to plant their illegal crops. They are opportunists, sneaking into private properties, planting their crops, which grows like a cancer. The only way police can keep on top of the problem, is to be informed.

If you see a strange vehicle parked where it shouldn't be, if you hear a generator running in an incongruous area in the middle of the night, or if you happen to come across a plot of marijuana, simply call the police.

It's the only way to keep this crime at bay.

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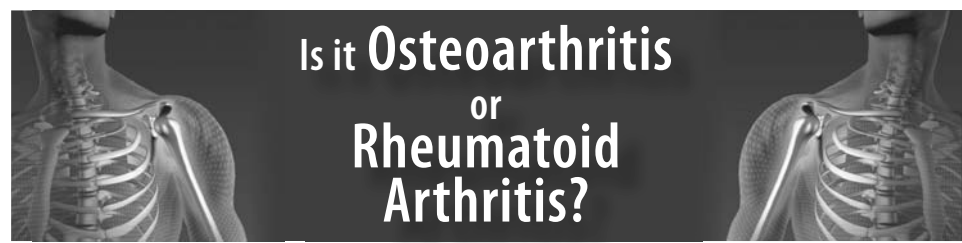
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