



Two police officers from Clinton, Iowa visited Georgetown recently to get a first-hand look at Halton Hills successful village constable programs. From left are Acton's village constable Bill Riddle, Lt. Mike Gertson from Clinton, Georgetown village constable Nick Leoni and Lt. Chuck Witt from Clinton.

Study village constable program

U.S. officers visit Halton Hills

By LISA TALLYN
Staff writer

Police officers from Clinton, Iowa have been in Halton over the past couple of weeks shadowing village constables and talking to Halton Police Service administrators about their successful community policing program.

On Tuesday, Lt. Chuck Witt and Lt. Mike Gertson of Clinton's police department were in Georgetown getting some pointers on community policing from Acton's village constable Bill Riddle and Georgetown's village constable Nick Leoni.

"We are experiencing some problems that have cropped up over a period of time," said Witt of Clinton. "The problems include gangs, vandalism and drugs."

The Clinton force is planning to launch a community policing program there to attempt to deal more effectively with those problems. Clinton has a population of 30,000 and is about a two-and-a half hour

drive from Chicago, Illinois.

The constable-centred generalist, or village constable is the mainstay of Halton's community policing program. It is a relatively new concept for Clinton, but has been in place in Halton for about seven years.

"We have a lot of visitors here to take a look at community policing," said Sgt. Dan Okoluski, coordinator of the program in Halton. "We are considered leaders in community policing right across North America."

The first village constable programs were started in Halton in Burlington and Nassagewaya in 1985. In 1988, a village constable began working in Acton and in 1991, Georgetown saw its first village constable.

"We have been showing the officers from Clinton what we do here," said Leoni. "They are learning the whole concept of community policing."


Leoni and Riddle explained to the two Clinton officers how they have become part of the communities they work in. They attend community events and serve on community groups and boards.

"The role of the police officer is changing. Twenty years ago it was our role to keep the peace, but now we do more than that. Now we have to act as social workers too," said Witt.

"In the past police have dealt with 5 per cent of the population 95 per cent of the time. Now we plan to become involved with the other 95 per cent," said Witt.

Witt says the process has been started in Clinton to put community policing into operation. A 12-block square has been identified as a target area and four officers have been assigned to work it.

Witt says the program will be similar to the Halton programs and a storefront office will be set up in the community.




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