

# Police point to organized crime

BY DONNA DANIELLI

The arrest of two men in July for mail theft led to cheers from the rural communities. However, it is suspected that these two men are small cogs in a large organization.

"We believe that these men are linked to a larger group," explains Detective Constable Lauren

Scisizzi. Despite pressing charges against the men, who pleaded not guilty in court on August 26 and will face a later trial, very little other information has come forward about the accused. "They were hired by someone else to steal cheques," says Constable Scisizzi. The cheques were turned over to unidentified individuals who deposited and cashed them through a variety of false bank accounts. "We're dealing with transients who are hard to track and may or may not be using their legitimate identities. They're immigrants without a lot of ties to the community, and they often use their immigration cards as identification to open the accounts." By the time the bank has discovered that the cheques are fraudulent, the thieves have moved on, established new identities or returned to their country of origin.

"It's not an individual taking the cheques for individual gain," explains Constable Scisizzi. "It's a group of individuals that are taking this money for a common goal." Approximately \$40,000 to \$50,000 has been taken from Halton mail

boxes since December of last year, and what disturbs Detective Constable Scisizzi is where that money may have gone. "It could be going back to another country; it could be being used to fund criminal activity. We just don't know."

Police suspect that Halton Region, Hamilton, Niagara Region and Guelph have all been targeted by the same group. Police services across southern Ontario are working together to pool resources and share information. "Every police agency is concerned with finding information on this ring," says Constable Scisizzi. "The more arrests that are made, the more information we can get."

Detective Constable Scisizzi stresses the need for the community to remain vigilant of strangers. She is quick to praise the postal workers and community members for their diligence in reporting strange vehicles. "The citizens out there are the ones that brought this to the forefront," says Detective Constable Scisizzi. "Their initiative led to these arrests and it speaks to this organization that we will not tolerate these thefts."

# Provincial PCs call fall election

BY DONNA DANIELLI

The Ontario election has been set for October 2. In Halton, the race is on between Progressive Conservative (PC) Ted Chudleigh, Liberal Barbara Sullivan and New Democratic Party (NDP) Jay Jackson. Some main issues of the election will certainly be education, food and water safety, hydro, garbage and transportation gridlock.

The double cohort issue has topped many news stories recently as the last of the Grade 13 and the first of the Grade 12 graduates both moved on to the province's post-secondary institutions. Mr. Chudleigh points out that his government has been preparing for this over the last three years with an additional \$1.5-billion used to construct new facilities. He points out that Ontario Student Assistance Program loans and university bursaries have been increased to meet the need. For Ms. Sullivan, this step is in the right direction but isn't enough. "We would freeze tuition for two years, and we would increase the amount of student aid," she promises. Additionally, the Liberal platform includes the creation of more apprenticeship and technical programs in secondary schools. Mr. Jackson's NDP party also promises to re-invest in post secondary education to cut tuition fees.

In the wake of West Nile virus, SARS, mad cow disease and the tainted meat from Aylmer, the NDP call for a re-instatement of staff at the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) and more meat inspectors. "Many of these catastrophes can be traced back to a government that has demolished public service and pushed for privatization," Mr. Jackson argues. "We'd be re-investing in staffing, not in using independent contractors whose bottom line is profit, not public safety." Ms. Sullivan also points to the firing of 130 meat inspectors and the budget cuts at the MOE as direct causes of some of the province's recent troubles. "If you don't have the human resources and the backup laboratory capacities available, you can't do the protection job that's required."

Mr. Chudleigh argues that this is unfair criticism. "None of these crises were created by the government," he argues. He points out that West Nile statistics are lower this year despite a wet spring; Ontario's water standards are amongst the highest in the country; and that a genetic tracing program, which began three years ago, allows for the immediate tracing of any infected dairy cattle in Ontario and will soon be in place for beef cattle as well. "The good thing from these events is that they make people aware that these problems do exist," says Mr. Chudleigh. "It allows you to prepare for them and to set standards."

All three parties agree that ensuring adequate electricity to homes and businesses is a key issue for most Ontario residents. Mr. Chudleigh admits that his party has made mistakes in dealing with Ontario Hydro, but argues: "Something had to be done. Ontario Hydro had a debt of \$38-billion. It's not an easy problem, but we had the guts to take it on." Also he notes that there are 1,500 mega watts of power more this year than were last year, and new alternate resources will soon be available. Although all three parties are in agreement that alternate sources of power such as wind power and hydroelectric power are needed, the NDP also favour programs that promote and encourage energy conservation. "We need to change the way that we generate electricity as well as changing the way we use it," explains Mr. Jackson. Ms. Sullivan's Liberals promise to close Ontario's three coal generators and to replace them with natural gas to reduce smog and pollution. "We will not sell off Ontario Hydro, but it's going to take time to accomplish," she says. "We are committed to new supply, to strong demand management and to upgrading the transmission grid."

Waste and waste disposal are one area in which all three parties are in agreement. Halton residents concerned that the Halton landfill will become home to Toronto's garbage can rest a little easier. All three candidates vow that will not happen. "We are not a willing host for Toronto's garbage," vows Ms. Sullivan, while Mr. Jackson explains, "It is not acceptable to throw your garbage over the fence and into your neighbour's community." Mr. Chudleigh reiterates his mandate that Halton will not accept any garbage from another community and adds, "I'll lay down in front of the truck if I have to."

Transit gridlock and public transportation also are key issues for all three parties. Mr. Jackson's NDPs want a shift in thinking. "We need to invest in downtown communities, not bedroom communities," he states. Ms. Sullivan points out that one of the first mandates a Liberal government would assume is requiring vehicles to use an ethanol fuel blend to reduce negative air emissions. Mr. Chudleigh argues that improved GO transit cannot happen without the construction of dedicated tracks, as opposed to the current system of sharing tracks with CN Rail. "Simply put, there'll be more track, more trains and more service, which is key for north Halton."

Both Barbara Sullivan and Jay Jackson believe that Ontario is ready for a change, while Ted Chudleigh believes that his party has a proven track record that will serve Ontario well over the next term of government.

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