

# Police board seeks region approval of 13.42% budget hike

While the Halton Regional Police Services Board has approved a \$70-million police budget for 2004—a 13.42 per cent increase over this year—its members warned Thursday that the public may soon balk at this escalating expense.

"We just can't keep these spiraling costs going," said board member Jack Brewer. "This is significant. Each year it increases."

In defense of his budget, Chief Ean Algar explained that he has little or no control over many costs, ranging from salaries, benefits, debt associated with capital expenditures and provincially mandated Adequacy Standards.

Left-field expenses like the Aug. 14 blackout, also have an impact.

"I don't have the flexibility that you seek," said Algar, who vowed nonetheless to continue looking for savings. "We're seeing a continual pull on our resources that take away from our day-to-day routine."

The 2003 operating budget totaled \$61.7-million. Next year's budget— if approved as-is by Halton Regional Council— would include funds for 19 uniformed officers and 11 civilians. It also encompasses a host of other costs, including \$2.5-million for the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System (OMERS).

Even if no new personnel were hired, said Algar, the budget would be \$69.1-million, or a 12 per cent increase over this year.

"As it stands, the budget approved Thursday works out to roughly \$168 per Halton resident or an average of \$473 per household. If "that's the kind of insurance people want to buy," fine, said Brewer, who added that the public may soon have enough.

"We've got to find ways to cut costs for things we don't consider absolutely necessary," he said.

Board member Keith Bird (Oakville Ward 3 councillor) agreed, saying the service and the public can simply continue to accept these increases as the "nature of the business" or police brass can find more innovative ways to carry out mandated duties.

"Somewhere along the line, unless we change the process it may be an unhappy situation," said Bird.

Alarmed by double-digit increases, board member Sandy Martin warned that at some point the public will question the

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—Halton Police Chief  
Ean Algar



value of the money spent—especially in conjunction with increasing tax burdens associated with school board costs.

Algar—who said he is proud of the strides made by his officers' many crime prevention and awareness programs—maintained that being more of a reactive service as opposed to a proactive one would also incur costs. He added that in a 2003 public opinion survey conducted by the region, 96 per cent of those citizens queried said they are satisfied with the quality of Halton's police service.

This, he continued, is set against a backdrop of dealing with the impacts of growth, resulting in increased calls for service (up 2.8 per cent so far in 2003) as well as criminal offenses and the crime rate which have jumped 12.48 and 8.7 per cent respectively over last year.

"We're slightly ahead of the trend but we're going back up," said Algar. "These, of course, are concerning trends and trends that must be addressed. This will certainly be a priority for us this year."

Other statistics include a rise in violent crime (2.8 per cent), property crimes (9.8 per cent), motor vehicle collisions (4.7 per cent), motor vehicle deaths (114 per cent) and impaired driving (3.2 per cent.) At 36.6 per cent, Halton's clearance rate is down from 37.5 per cent, a number that is still above the provincial average.

In addition to growth (Halton's population increases by 12,000 to 15,000 people each year) Algar said 2004 budget challenges will include a rise in frauds of "tremendous sophistication" and counterfeiting, more than 1,000 cases of which have been uncovered this year. Even fake \$5 bills are now in circulation, said Algar.

Other challenges include the demand for greater targeted programs like traffic enforcement, street gangs and domestic violence plus issues related to prisoner transport, court security and more. Officers are also coping with the onerous demands of two to three homicides a year and the overall "ever-increasing complexities of police work."

"Nothing seems to be simple anymore," said Algar.

Also looming in the future are the results of workload and staffing studies, pressed for by the Halton Regional Police Association, which will quantify the demands on front-line officers.

—By Howard Mozel, special

## Interim minister faces busy days

Interim minister Kent Fromer is enjoying his new position at St. Andrew's and Ballinafad United Churches.

Fromer, who recently moved to Ontario from San Diego, California, said he has noticed a big difference in the weather here, and in the pace of life.

"The pace of life is slower here," said Fromer. "I'm enjoying that."

Fromer said over the coming months he will be busy with plans for the new seniors' residence project at St. Andrew's and hopes to be able to attract more young people and young families to the church.

Attracting young people is something all churches are struggling with, said Fromer.

The minister took an interesting approach to the problem while serving as the pastor at a church in Laguna Beach. He said he was proud to have earned the nickname "Entertainment Pastor" while there.

He and the parishioners would view a movie or video then he would conduct a bible study based on the film.

Fromer, an ordained minister since 1997, was a minister at a United-Methodist Church in San Diego before moving to Canada for family reasons.

Along with preparing for the holiday season at the church, Fromer will also be involved in the church's 45th anniversary celebration.

To mark the occasion the church will



St. Andrews United Church will be celebrating its 45th anniversary Sunday, and the congregation is looking forward to burning the mortgage. Brian Heinmiller (left), chair of St. Andrews finance committee and Rev. Kent Fromer took part in a rehearsal last week with a photocopy. Photo by Ted Brown

burn its mortgage, taken out when the current sanctuary was built in 1984, at a service Sunday, November 30. The mortgage was paid off last month.

Fromer said the church has seen some changes in its 45 years.

"It's grown along with the community. We hope to continue to do so," he said.

In June 1958 a building committee was formed to investigate a design for the church. The original church was an A-frame building, and the first sanctuary is currently the fellowship and social hall.

The current sanctuary was built in 1984

at a cost of \$395,000. The \$158,000 mortgage from the National Church took 19 years to pay off.

But the new sanctuary finally meant St. Andrew's had a real church with a pulpit, communion table, tri-chair, baptismal font and cross.

Many families donated funds to furnish the new sanctuary.

All are welcome to attend the service on Sunday, to begin at 9:30 a.m. A cake and reception is to follow.

—By Lisa Tallyn, staff writer

## Rural homes targeted again

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Later that night someone broke into a Steeles Ave. home through an unlocked side door and took a set of car keys, which were used to steal a 1994 Chevrolet Cavalier parked in the driveway. The car was later found abandoned on 5 Sideroad.

That same night someone entered an unlocked vehicle at a neighbouring Eighth Line home and took cash and a cellular phone. The phone was later recovered.

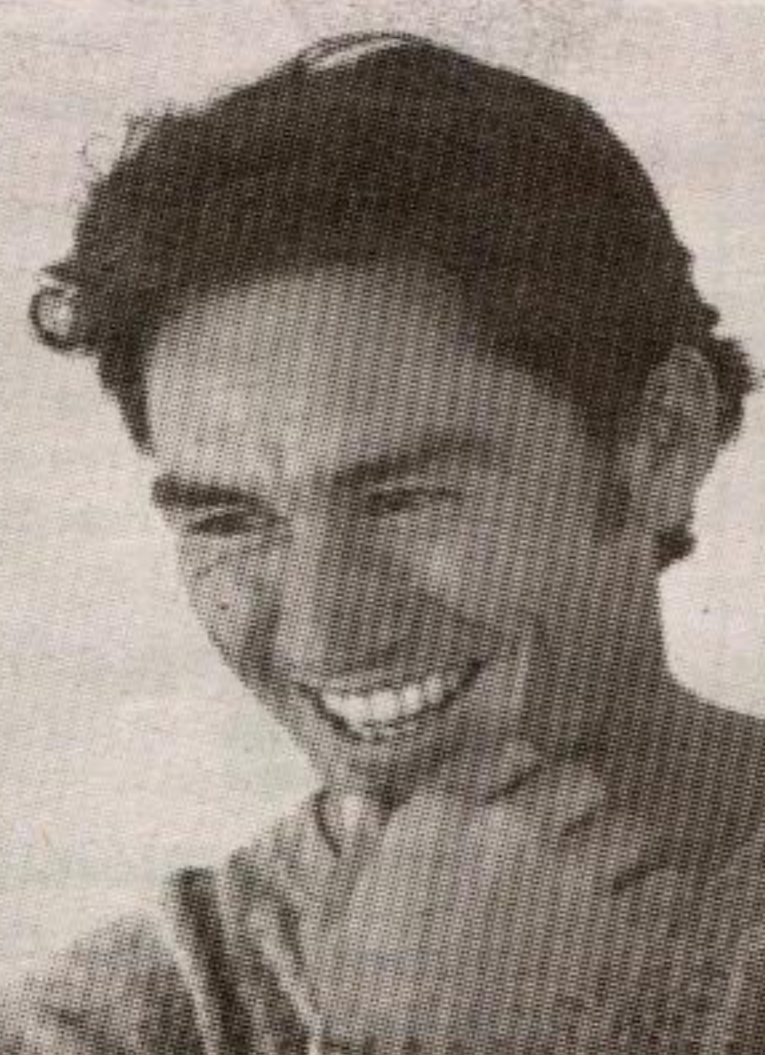
At approximately the same time on Eighth Line, someone entered a garage through an unlocked rear door and went through a vehicle but nothing was taken.

Police report another home on 5 Sideroad was entered that night. A wallet, containing cash, and keys were taken.

Police say at approximately 3 a.m. Sunday a 1993 Plymouth Voyager van that had been stolen in Peel Region was found abandoned on the Eighth Line north of Steeles Ave. A hockey bag full of equipment was left in the driveway of an Eighth Line home. Anyone missing hockey equipment is asked to call Detective Bob Andrews at 905-878-5511 ext. 2106.

—By Lisa Tallyn, staff writer

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