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Anonymity key to Crime Stoppers

By HOWARD MOZEL
 Special to The Champion

When the head of Crime Stoppers of Halton says she promises the anonymity of all informants, the survival of the entire program depends on her word.

"We guarantee that in Canada and we've gone as far as the Supreme Court to maintain confidentiality," says board of directors chair Karen Sunter. "That's our whole program, to protect the tipster."

No information is ever released that might narrow down the identity of informants and Crime Stoppers doesn't subscribe to call display. The lengths to which organizers go have certainly paid off: everything from murder and auto theft to fraud and burglary has been solved as a result of the program.

"Many people don't want to get involved," said Ms Sunter. "We don't ask them to get involved, just to make an anonymous call."

Crime Stoppers provides a means for people to relate crime-solving tips to police and pays cash to those whose information leads to arrests. No tax dollars are used for the rewards and the program depends on the generosity of companies, service clubs and individuals. Calls are taken seven days a week, 24 hours a day, at 1-800-222-TIPS or locally at 825-TIPS.

Tipsters often refuse rewards

Tipsters can call back using their code number to check on the progress of an investigation and if an arrest is made, a reward will be paid.

Ms Sunter said, however, that about 90 per cent of informants don't want the cash. "More often than not, people don't call back for the money. People are just community-minded."

From Crime Stoppers Halton's inception in December, 1989 to September of this year, this kind of grassroots participation has racked up an impressive list of statistics: \$1.6 million worth of drugs seized, \$932,774 worth of property recovered, 1,003 police cases closed and 417 arrests.

The value of illegal drugs seized in Halton as a result of anonymous tips tripled in 1998 thanks to information forwarded to Crime Stoppers. The value went up from \$155,800 in 1997 to \$472,380.

Program shows results

Anonymous tips led to the arrest of 28 people in 1998 and resulted in 58 charges. Even the value of stolen property rose 18 per cent from \$16,500 in 1997 to \$19,500 last year.

Halton Regional Police Det. Lee-Ann Ansell makes it clear that Crime Stoppers is a community-based program staffed by volunteers and that she's the only police officer involved. That's not to say, of course, that law enforcement is not a vital component of the partnership that also involves Halton residents and all forms of media.

Det. Ansell is also quick to point out that tips generated by Crime Stoppers are not a short cut to methodical police work.

"They are just another lead," she said.

As far as the public is concerned, Ms Sunter's appeal to residents to participate basically hinges on the Golden Rule.

"Anything that can happen can happen to you," she said. "And you would like someone to help."



Crime Stoppers launched by Canadian-born officer

Although Crime Stoppers began in the United States, the innovative program was actually founded by a Canadian-born police officer.

John MacCleese was a member of the Albuquerque, New Mexico police department and in 1976 his investigation of a murder/robbery was going nowhere.

He hatched a plan, cleared by his superiors, to run an article in the local paper calling for anonymous witnesses and to offer a reward from his own pocket.

As luck would have it, a vital lead originated from a call and within 24 hours MacCleese had solved an unrelated rape. In 72 hours, he'd solved the murder.

Volunteer crime-fighters wanted

By HOWARD MOZEL
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Crime Stoppers of Halton is looking for volunteers to flesh out its already dedicated core of supporters.

According to board of directors chair Karen Sunter, the program is already a success, but with even more people on board, a number of important new initiatives can maximize the program's potential.

Particularly important, says Halton Regional Police Det. Lee-Ann Ansell — the only law enforcement member of Crime Stoppers of Halton — is the marketing of the program throughout the community.

"My personal goal is to get Crime Stoppers' phone number (1-800-222-TIPS or locally at 825-TIPS) in every household and business," she said.

Crime Stoppers of Halton was created in 1989, not as a police initiative, but by residents wanting to become involved to improve their community. (Its first chair was Stu Chapman, Burlington's Volunteer of the Year for 1998.)

Today, Crime Stoppers is anchored by an active 15-member board that is spread a little too thin to run new endeavors designed to spread the word about the program.

Individuals are needed, therefore, for a host of subcommittees, such as fundraising (bingos etc.) and promotion (mall displays, poster drops).

Ideally, says Det. Ansell, would be the creation of an 'ambassador program' similar to that run by the Lions Foundation of Canada to actively promote Crime Stoppers. In short, a bank of volunteers from which the board can draw.

"We need many more volunteers in a host of areas," said Det. Ansell, who can be contacted regarding volunteerism at 825-4747, ext. 5139.

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COGECO 14 Programming Schedule — November 2nd - November 8th, 1999

Tuesday, November 2nd	Wednesday, November 3rd	Thursday, November 3rd	Sunday, November 7th	Monday, November 8th
10am, 11am, 12pm Plugged In! Encore	10am, 11am, 12pm Plugged In! Encore	10am, 11am, 12pm Plugged In! Encore	4pm, 5pm, 6:30pm Plugged In! Week in Review	10am, 11am, 12pm Plugged In! Encore
5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!	4:30pm The Local Scene	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!
6:00pm Seniors Showcase	6:00pm Cable in the Classroom	6:00pm The Local Scene	5:30pm Seniors Showcase	6:00pm The Art of Watercolour
7:00pm Money Week	7:00pm Swap Talk	7:00pm The Issue is..		7:00pm Living On the Edge
8:00pm Halton Hills Council	8:00pm Milton Council	8:00pm Halton Region Council		8:00pm SportsZONE Live

Feature this week: Stuff to sell? Edge Goba can move your unwanted items on "Swap Talk" - Live Wednesday, 7 pm