

Calls to women's shelters doubling in numbers

By LISA TALLYN
Special to The Champion

In the wake of recent murders and violent attacks on women, the Halton Violence Prevention Council reports some of its member agencies have been receiving more calls than usual from women who are living in fear.

Theresa Greer, executive director of Halton Women's Place, said while statistics aren't available yet for July, the women's shelter received about twice as many calls from women in crisis in June than they did in April and May. Usually about 100 calls per month come into the shelter.

Ms Greer said recent events such as the murder of Gillian Hadley by her estranged husband, have heightened the awareness of women who are victims of domestic violence.

"It's like a fear, could this happen, and what can I do to get out of this situation, or how do we prevent it?" said Ms Greer.

She added unfortunately there's no easy answer as the situations are so complex. Bev LaFrancois, executive director of the Halton Rape Crisis Centre, said there has been a marked increase in crisis line calls. In the last month the crisis centre received 50 more calls than the usual 200 or so, or about a 20 per cent increase. "It's making them (women) feel their vulnerability. Women are talking about the number of women being killed by their partners."

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BEV LAFRANCOIS

Ms Greer said traditionally women's shelters are full in the summer but this year it seems there have been more requests for service.

She said over the past year shelter staff has noticed a huge increase in the number of women being stalked by former boyfriends, husbands and partners. "It's a huge intimidation."

She said she knows of three women currently staying at the shelter who are being stalked.

Halton Police report only a small increase in domestic assault charges in the region this year compared to last. Last year to the end of June there had been 131 domestic assaults compared to 136 this year for the same period.

For immediate assistance Halton women can call Halton Rape Crisis Centre, 878-1555, Halton Women's Place, 878-8555, Halton Police, 878-5511 or 911, Halton Health Care Services, 845-2571, North Halton Distress Centre, 877-1211, Halton Adolescent Support Services, 878-9785, Kids' Helpline, 1-800-668-6868, Halton Children's Aid Society, 878-2375 or SOS Femmes, 1-800-387-8603.

Trend leans to historic downtown

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view," he explained.

The trend today, said Mr. van Nostrand, leans toward a historic downtown concept with increasingly less emphasis on malls.

"It's not just the aging population, but a growing entrepreneurial younger generation who want to shop that way," said Mr. van Nostrand. "They want to be on the street where they can see the sky and the trees."

Even big box stores are getting in on the act.

"Large boxes, the successful ones like Loblaws, aren't turning their back on Main Street. They're turning sideways," he said.

And Milton is ideally placed to begin laying down the foundations for a thriving centre before the moving trucks start shoveling new residents in.

"The opportunity here is to make sure the Main Street businesses are tied into the larger Milton growth structure," said Mr. van Nostrand. "That's an unprecedented opportunity you have before you."

To make the most of it, Milton residents and business owners will be consulted on their thoughts for the CBD — which will eventually run along Main Street from Bronte Street to Thompson Road — through public meetings and focus groups.

Many participants at the breakfast meeting fingered parking as the issue of the future.

While plenty of parking is currently found tucked behind Main Street on either side, it suffers without a visual link to the main street, said Mr. van Nostrand.

"When you're on Main Street you can't see the parking and when you see the parking, you can't see Main Street," he said. "It's like two different worlds."

A more visible parking presence is a money generator, he added.

And it could lead to the widening out of the downtown area, allowing businesses behind Main Street to flourish.

"Main Street can't carry the whole load," warned Mr. van Nostrand.

Milton suffers a likewise divide across the Sixteen Mile Creek, pointed out Mr. van Nostrand. He said not only was the town designed in such a way that the creek is all but invisible, but the atmosphere of the town differs on either side of it.

"There really are two distinct stretches of Main Street. West of the Sixteen Mile Creek and east of the Sixteen Mile Creek."

He said he hopes to make the creek more of a focal point in the newly designed town.

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