



# Community Page

## Community approach needed in the battle to protect seniors from fraud artists: police

By HOWARD MOZEL

Special to The Champion

One might think that as an officer on the frontline against elder abuse, Halton Regional Police Const. Gregg Davidson might possess a pessimistic view of human nature.

But in reality, he's heartened by all those who have stepped up to face the issue head on.

"I love my job because most people are good-intentioned," said Const. Davidson, the region's Elder Services Support Officer, a position created last year. "It is very fulfilling, very eye-opening."

As a 15-year police veteran, however, Const. Davidson has also seen his share of heartache, ranging from neglect to incidents of people preying on the elderly's trust, good nature and health problems.

Take for example the door-to-door "jewelry appraiser" who walked off with a Burlington woman's valuables (but was later arrested) or those peddling fraudulent driveway and roofing work. Const. Davidson also quoted the case of a male caregiver who sexually assaulted a wheelchair-bound gentleman in his seventies.

Fortunately, said Const. Davidson, the good people in Halton far outweigh the bad.

"That's why it has to be a community approach," he said. "My prime function is education, to educate seniors and caregivers and the public."

As of 2002 there were about 45,000 seniors in Halton, a number that's expected to double in 10 to 15 years, said Const. Davidson, making the need for awareness all the more pressing.

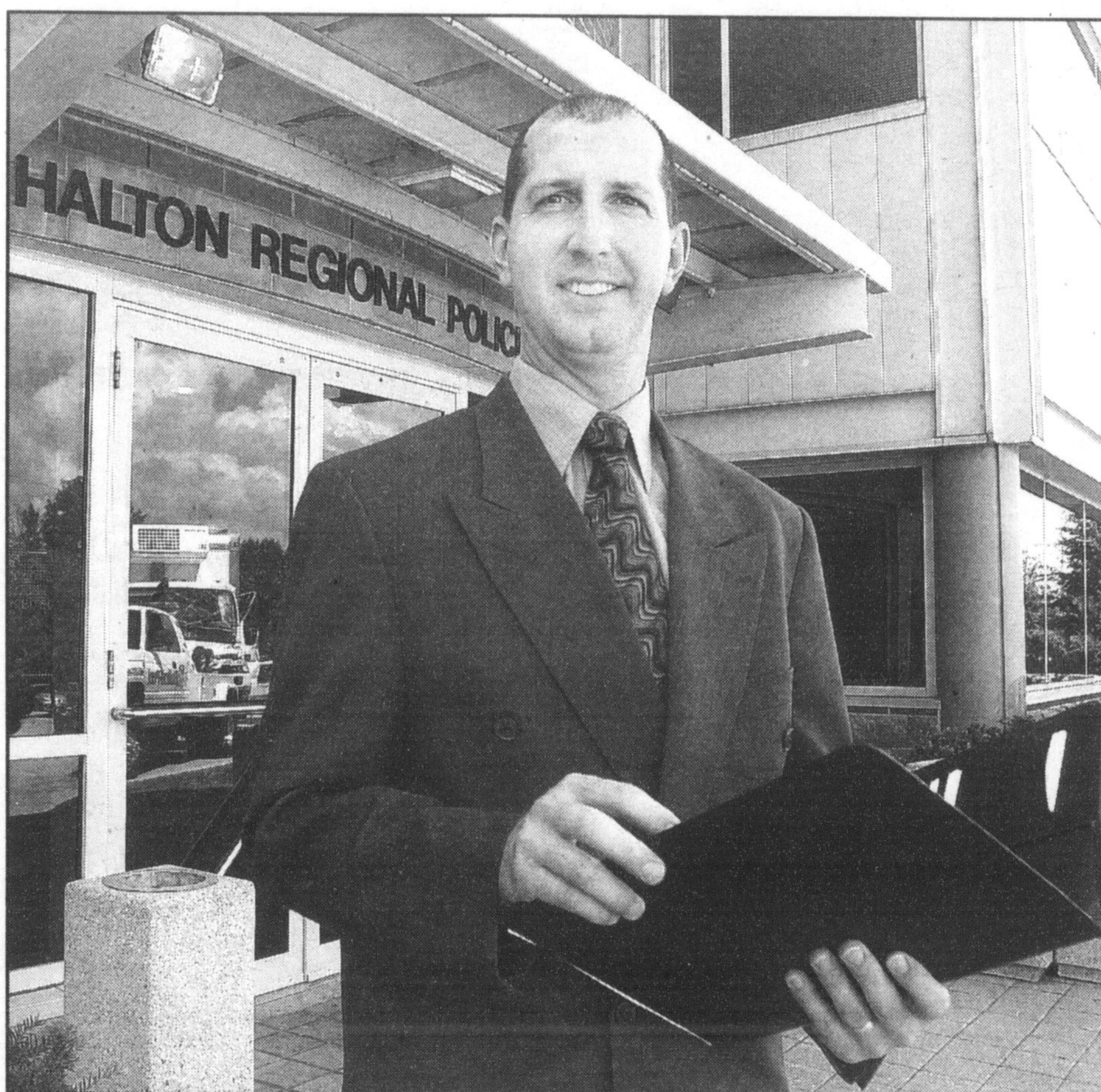
"That's why we're going out into the community now," he said.

### Collective effort

Integral to this effort is Burlington Det. Const. Cathi Tharme, whose mandate is to investigate crimes against seniors. There are also five liaison officers for seniors' issues spread throughout the region and Const. Davidson looks forward to having a Det. Constable dedicated to seniors in each community.

"This is unique in policing," he said.

Const. Davidson makes it clear, though, that police are only part of the equation so, in keeping with a community-based approach, officers work hand-in-glove with a wide array of agencies. These range from Community Care Access Halton, VON and long-term care facility staff to Seniors and Law Enforcement Together (SALT),



Halton Regional Police Const. Gregg Davidson keeps busy trying to combat the many forms of seniors abuse.

the Elder Services Advisory Committee and the Elder Abuse Prevention Committee.

"We have a lot of resources to tap into to solve these problems," said Const. Davidson. "It's holistic."

Abuse and neglect of an elderly person is defined as any action or inaction by any individual or institution that results in harm or neglect of that person.

Given the delicate way in which many situations — especially those involving family — must be handled, the program's goal is to try to deal proactively.

This means not just laying charges, but solving issues be they social or criminal.

"Laying charges and taking people to court is not necessarily in the best interest of victims," said Const. Davidson.

Particularly tricky are crimes and neglect perpetrated by family members, many of which are not reported because of what Const. Davidson

calls the "love factor." This involves seniors who want the abuse to stop, but don't want their abuser to get into trouble. That's when police step in to work with all parties to solve the situation, but don't always file charges.

Other cases are more clear-cut, but no less heartbreaking, like the drug-addicted daughter, who sold everything in her mother's house — even the furniture — leaving nothing but a few precious belongings locked in the trunk of the elderly woman's vehicle. By the time police became involved, the daughter was in the process of using a crowbar to open the car.

In another instance, children got their parents to sign over the deed to their house then promptly tried to evict them.

"It's very sad to see seniors who worked so hard to get what they have taken by a selfish child," said Const. Davidson.

Such thefts-by-family include children, who use their power of attorney over parents to steal

from them, a crime which Const. Davidson says many police officers are not aware of and is currently being tested in a Halton court.

Inadvertent neglect is another problem, as illustrated by the elderly woman who endured a substandard life because her daughter was forced to split care between her mother and a husband with cancer. That's technically not a crime, said Const. Davidson, but intervention was still necessary.

Phone fraud from strangers, of course, is also prevalent, as are scams involving "emergency" repairs and products seniors don't need and can't possibly use — like the expensive vacuum cleaner sold to a blind woman, who lives in an apartment with only hardwood floors.

### Fraud artists sharing info

Even worse, many perpetrators share information about victims, Const. Davidson explained, and one result was the lady who was victimized by six different contractors for work she didn't need.

That's why it's important for people to keep a friendly eye on their more defenseless neighbours. After all, said Const. Davidson, these seniors are people who fought for and built this country and often still conduct their lives with traditional values.

"(Perpetrators) target vulnerable people, people for whom a handshake meant something," he said.

Const. Davidson and Det. Const. Tharme are also involved in training front-line caregivers, as well as police officers, on seniors' issues and the steps to identify signs of abuse and neglect.

Unique to Ontario is the full day of seniors training that Halton Regional Police recruits receive. It includes everything from understanding dementia to fraud and abuse.

Key to this are scenarios played out by 20 senior volunteer actors with whom new officers interact and often quickly realize that a special touch is required when dealing with the elderly.

Const. Davidson's secret weapon to drive this point home is a woman who can cry on cue, something that really throws officers off.

"There is a certain way to approach seniors," said Const. Davidson. "If you do it in the wrong manner they won't get the information they need."

The police are also seeking to make younger people and teenagers aware of seniors' issues and to involve them in the lives of the elderly to help bridge the gap between generations.

"We can't lose that," said Const. Davidson.

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Programming Schedule — Tuesday, February 17th - Monday February 23th, 2004

Tuesday, February 17		Wednesday, February 18		Thursday, February 19		Friday, February 20		Saturday, February 21		Sunday, February 22		Monday, February 23	
5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Early Week Edition	5pm, 6pm	Plugged In! Early Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Early Week Edition	5pm, 6pm	Plugged In!	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Late Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Late Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Late Week Edition
5:30pm	Seniors Showcase	5:30pm	PeopleSpeak in Halton	5:30pm	Oster Health Connection			5:30pm	Be Inspired	5:30pm	Be Inspired	5:30pm	With Good Taste
6:30pm	Optimist TV Bingo (Live)	6:30pm	Be Inspired	6:30pm	Money Week			6:30pm	Seniors Showcase	6:30pm	Seniors Showcase	6:30pm	Faces-Kranes & Barnes
8:00pm	Halton Hills Council - Feb 16	8:00pm	Swap Talk (Live)	7:00pm	The Issue Is...			7:00pm	PeopleSpeak in Halton	7:00pm	PeopleSpeak in Halton	7:00pm	Be Inspired
		8:00pm	Halton Region Council Feb. 11	8:00pm	Main Street			8:00pm	Money Week	8:00pm	Money Week	8:00pm	SportsZONE Live (Live)
								8:30pm	Faces - Kerr & Day				

"Swap Talk: The TV Garage Sale Live Every Wednesday, 7 pm"