



ON BOARD: Toronto Police Sgt. Larry Zimmerman (right) and Halton Regional Police Const. Andy Dennis are now at the helm of MADD Halton-Peel.

Police officers head local MADD group

By Howard Mozel
SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) Halton-Peel has received a much-needed boost with the appointment of two police officers as president and vice-president.

Toronto Police Sgt. Larry Zimmerman, a life-long Burlington resident and a married father of five, now heads up the agency. Halton Regional Police Const. Andy Dennis, a married father of one also living in Burlington, is his right hand.

Together, they've seen the impaired driving issue from the streets to the courtrooms and armed with this experience — some of it eye-opening, much of it tragic — the chapter can't help but benefit.

After all, MADD Halton-Peel has been struggling against financial pressures and a dearth of volunteers, and has had difficulty delivering all the programs and services that staff feel the community deserves.

In short, it needs money and volunteers if it's to survive as an effective defense against the horrors of impaired driving — not an easy task considering the chapter serves two regions with a combined population of roughly 1.6 million people.

As a result, both Zimmerman and Dennis say that, in addition to continuing to get the anti-drunk driving message out to the public, their immediate focus will be on attracting board members and volunteers plus raising funds so the chapter can carry out its mandate.

Both officers have simply seen too much not to try: twisted wreckage, shattered lives and a court system that is often too lenient, considering the horrific damage involved. Both men

have also heard every excuse in the book and wish they could get across to every driver that being drunk and being impaired are not the same thing. Both are chargeable offenses.

"No one thinks they're drunk, but even if you don't blow over 80, you can still be impaired," said Dennis, adding that marijuana is another growing problem affecting the safe operation of vehicles. "That's a new one... that makes reaction time slower."

Another sore spot with Zimmerman is that some judges don't take impaired driving as seriously as they should, especially when no one has been injured and they see it as a "victimless crime."

Another area of concern involves drivers in the 30 to 45 year old age group — the worst offenders — who don't appear to be getting the message.

"Drinking is social," said Zimmerman, who makes it clear that MADD members are not prohibitionists. "Drunk driving is criminal."

The sad part, said Dennis, is that drunk driving is entirely preventable. In the meantime, he explained, police officers will continue to make the dreaded knock on the door to tell families a loved one is either injured or dead.

"That's the hardest thing to do," said Dennis. "There's no good way to do it."

Both he and Zimmerman recall stories of attending collision scenes and smelling the alcohol-tainted blood amidst the crushed metal. They have also attended autopsies of people who are literally dead drunk and smelled the booze.

"As soon as they cut the chest open, boom," said Dennis, who added that one drink is too many if you plan on driving.

Zimmerman was born in Hamilton, but grew up in Burlington. (He attend-

ed Lord Elgin, now Robert Bateman, High School.) He joined the Toronto Police Service in 1986 and spent 12 years on patrol in Regent Park. His time with the traffic unit — including his work as a Level 3 reconstructionist — really opened his eyes to the impacts of drunk driving.

Zimmerman joined MADD Halton-Peel in June 2005 after reading a story in the local press about the agency's dire need for board members and volunteers. He hopes to bring all his experience — from police officers to victims — to bear on impaired driving in the regions.

Dennis is originally from Toronto and joined that city's police service in 1998. After a stint with 14 Division and traffic services — also earning his Level 2 reconstructionist designation — he joined Halton Regional Police in 2002.

Dennis decided to join MADD last year for several reasons: his wife's friend was killed by a drunk driver in Calgary and in his role as police officer he's laid far too many drunk driving and impaired charges — with no end in sight.

"Complacency is a huge problem," he said, explaining that he and Zimmerman volunteered for the executive positions with MADD and encourages other community-minded individuals to think likewise. "People have to step up. It's a great organization."

Also welcome are high school students who can apply time spent with MADD to their community service hours.

For more information or to volunteer, contact MADD Halton-Peel at (905) 844-0096 or e-mail info@maddhalton.ca. Or visit the chapter's Web site at www.maddhalton.ca. Or drop by the MADD office at 466 Speers Rd., suite 5B, in Oakville Monday through Thursday from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Ask The Professionals

If you have any questions these professionals can answer, please write to:

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Preventive Dentistry For Children

Q: What is preventive dentistry?

A: Preventive dentistry for children includes: brushing, dental development, flossing, fluorides, oral habits, orthodontics, parental involvement, proper diet, sealants and sports safety.

Q: Why is preventive dentistry important?

A: Preventive dentistry means a healthy smile for your child. Children with healthy mouths chew more easily and gain more nutrients from the foods they eat. They learn to speak more quickly and clearly. They have a better chance of general health, because disease in the mouth can endanger the rest of the body. A healthy mouth is more attractive, giving children confidence in their appearance. Finally, preventive dentistry means less extensive, and less expensive, treatment for your child.

Q: When should preventive dentistry start?

A: Preventive dentistry begins with the first tooth. Visit your dentist when the first tooth comes in. You will learn how to protect your infant's dental health. The earlier the dental visit, the better the chance of preventing dental disease and helping your child belong to the cavity-free generation.

Q: What role do parents play in prevention?

A: After evaluating your child's dental health, your dentist will design a personalized program of home care for your child. This program will include brushing and flossing instructions, and if necessary, fluoride recommendations. By following these directions, you can help give your child a lifetime of healthy habits.

Q: How do dentists help prevent dental problems?

A: Tooth cleaning and polishing and fluoride treatments are all part of your child's prevention program. But there's much more. For example, your dentist can apply sealants to protect your child from tooth decay, help you select a mouth guard to prevent sports injuries to the face and teeth, and provide early diagnosis and care of orthodontic problems.

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