

Attorney General:

Violent crime climbing

Last week Attorney General Charles Harnick touched on several sensitive policing and justice system issues in his Burlington speech to the Ontario Association of Police Chiefs.

One thing upon which the minister and his audience agreed was that serious crime is on the increase.

"In Ontario, the crime rate did not decline. Violent crime is still 36 per cent higher nationally than it was a decade ago. Violent youth crime increased two per cent, the ninth increase in the past 10 years."

Mr. Harnick praised his government for the recently passed Victims' Bill of Rights which includes, among other features, a victim's justice fund and an automated victim notification system which will keep them informed of the progress of trials and

the status of perpetrators.

On the contentious issue of youth crime, Mr. Harnick said the provincial Conservatives consider the federal Young Offenders Act a failure.

"We believe anyone aged 16 or older should be tried in adult court. We believe the names of youths convicted of serious, violent offences should be made public, in the interest of community safety.

"We believe the federal government should allow prosecutions, in some cases, where the offender is under the age of 12." Halton Regional Police Association president Jim Dawson isn't completely convinced playing hardball with young offenders is the right strategy.

"I find if we drag 12 and 13-year-olds to court, it just familiarizes them with the system."



Raising the flag

Mayor Gord Krantz (left) and volunteers were on hand for a recent flag raising to kick off Arthritis Month in September. From left are Audrea Lear-Costigan, Helen Powers, Bev Mehlenbacher, Marilyn Bahnman, Jim Powers, Elfriede Brynkus and Jane Comber of the Arthritis Society's Milton branch.

Cuts into the bone: Cops

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Const. Dawson said the ratio of police officers to citizens in Halton is one to 1,000. HRP administrator Paul LaCourse said the figure puts Halton in the same position as York Region in having among the highest per capita ratios in the province.

"There's no lack of support for police budgets, there's a lack of political will," noted Const. Dawson, a reference to Mr. Harnick's "there are no additional dollars to spend" remark.

Part of that frustration, he noted, stems from the recent decision by the Halton Regional Police Service to hire a part-time, front-line officer. "It's a knee jerk, Band-Aid solution," to staffing cuts, said Const. Dawson.

"We need full-time, committed officers. We don't need transient help. We carry guns and are highly accountable for what we do. Why not take the cash for part-time policing and dedicate it to full-time officers?"

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