

# Vandalism program in schools

In recent months, incidents of vandalism have been on the increase in the Midland area. Certainly this trend was made apparent to Midlanders last week, as vandals struck the Midland YMCA with thoughtless fury.

The Midland detachment of the OPP is concerned about this increase in vandalism, and are trying to do something about it. Constable Chuck Coulson is presently conducting a vandalism education program in area schools, and although the program's immediate purpose is to educate school age children to the pointlessness of vandalism, Coulson is finding their response to the program in itself educational.

"I'm discovering some pretty interesting things from the kids," he says. "You start to get a good idea of what causes vandalism from the classroom discussions."

In 1976, Coulson notes, there were 88,370 incidents of vandalism reported in Ontario. Of the six major categories of crimes, incidents of vandalism ranked second in frequency. Although this in itself is significant, he comments, the fact that vandalism is the only category of crime where there is no gain for the criminal casts a disturbing light on the statistics.

Constable Coulson also notes that of crimes committed in 1976, 16,500 were committed by people in the 16 to 25 years age group. Since vandalism is the second

highest crime committed in the province, the two figures compounded indicate statistically that vandalism is a problem largely centred among young people.

The OPP vandalism program is aimed at public school students. Constable Coulson explains that "by trying to get children under 16 to understand what causes vandalism, we hope that their understanding would prevent it."

In his classroom discussions, Coulson has found that school children see several factors leading to high rates of vandalism. Among these are peer pressure, a phenomenon which

compels normally well-behaved children to commit acts they might not otherwise even think of doing on their own. Coulson says that the children also cite boredom as a reason why acts of vandalism are committed: children feel constrained and needing some sort of excitement, they damage property.

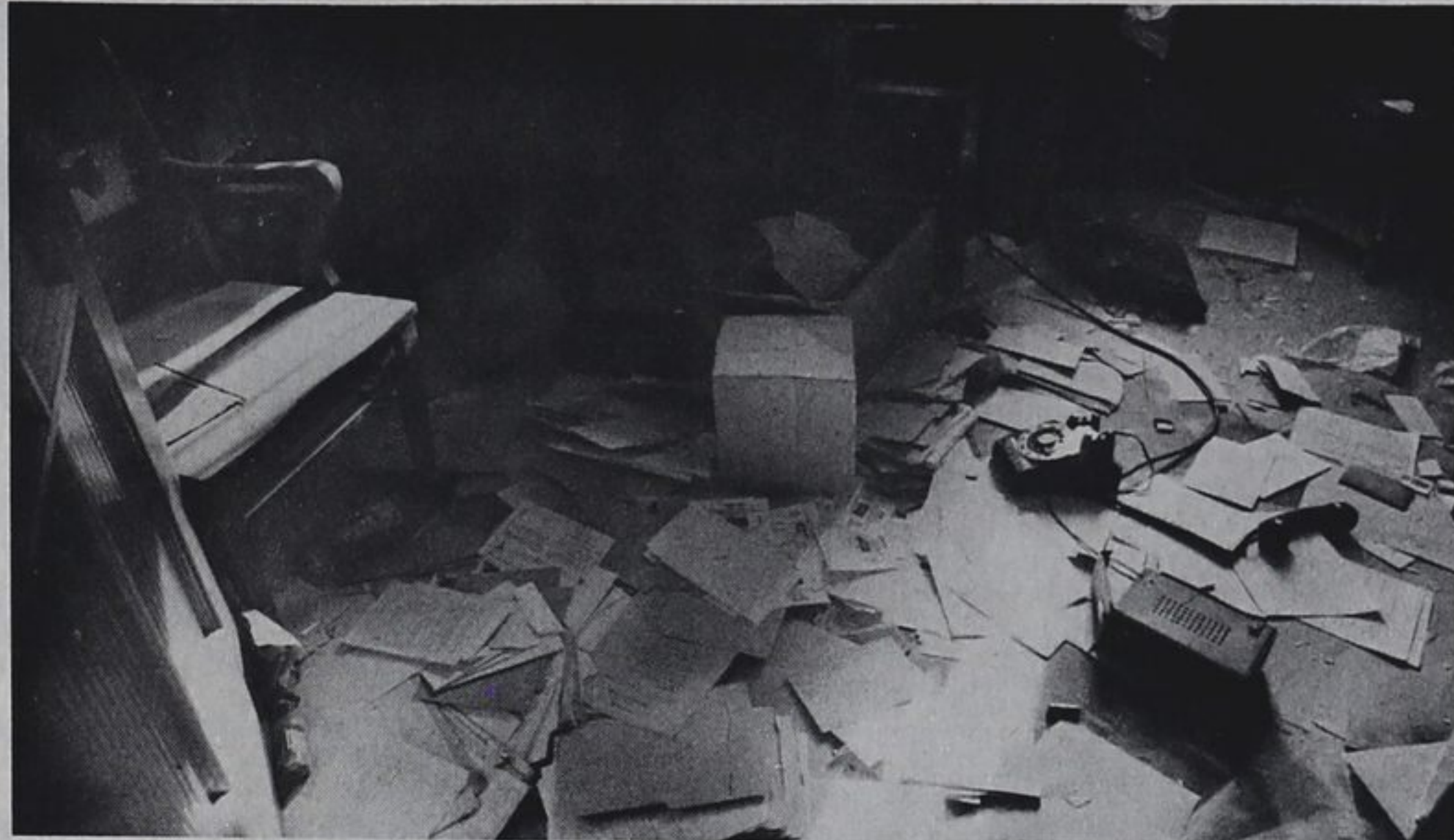
The children also state that the use of alcohol and drugs contribute to malicious acts. These stimulants give children a destructively false sense of confidence. Revenge is another factor cited: to destroy property hurts the owner more than stealing it.

Coulson says that in his talks he tries to emphasize that vandalism not only hurts the property owner, but also the taxpayer. Especially in the case of schools—frequently targets for vandals—with each act of wilful damage, school budgets are strained, and as a result school services are reduced and taxes are increased.

Not only does Coulson solicit the views of the students with regards to the causes of vandalism, he also asks their opinion on what sort of retribution should be made. He notes that a large percentage of students feel that paying for damage done is

inadequate, and that many express a view that would have apprehended vandals contribute to the actual physical task of repairing the property.

Coulson tries to bring out the pointlessness of vandalism by showing a film entitled "The Clubhouse." In the film, four youngsters leave a clubhouse they have built and go on a window breaking spree. They are spotted by a police cruiser and one of the vandals is apprehended. The other three children run frantically back to their clubhouse—only to find upon returning that it too has been vandalized in their absence.



Reason for program

The Midland detachment of the OPP has started a vandalism education program in area schools, with the hope that scenes like this, taken last week at the

Midland YMCA, will not be repeated. Constable Chuck Coulson is running the program, and says that the response by school children to it is revealing.

Staff photo

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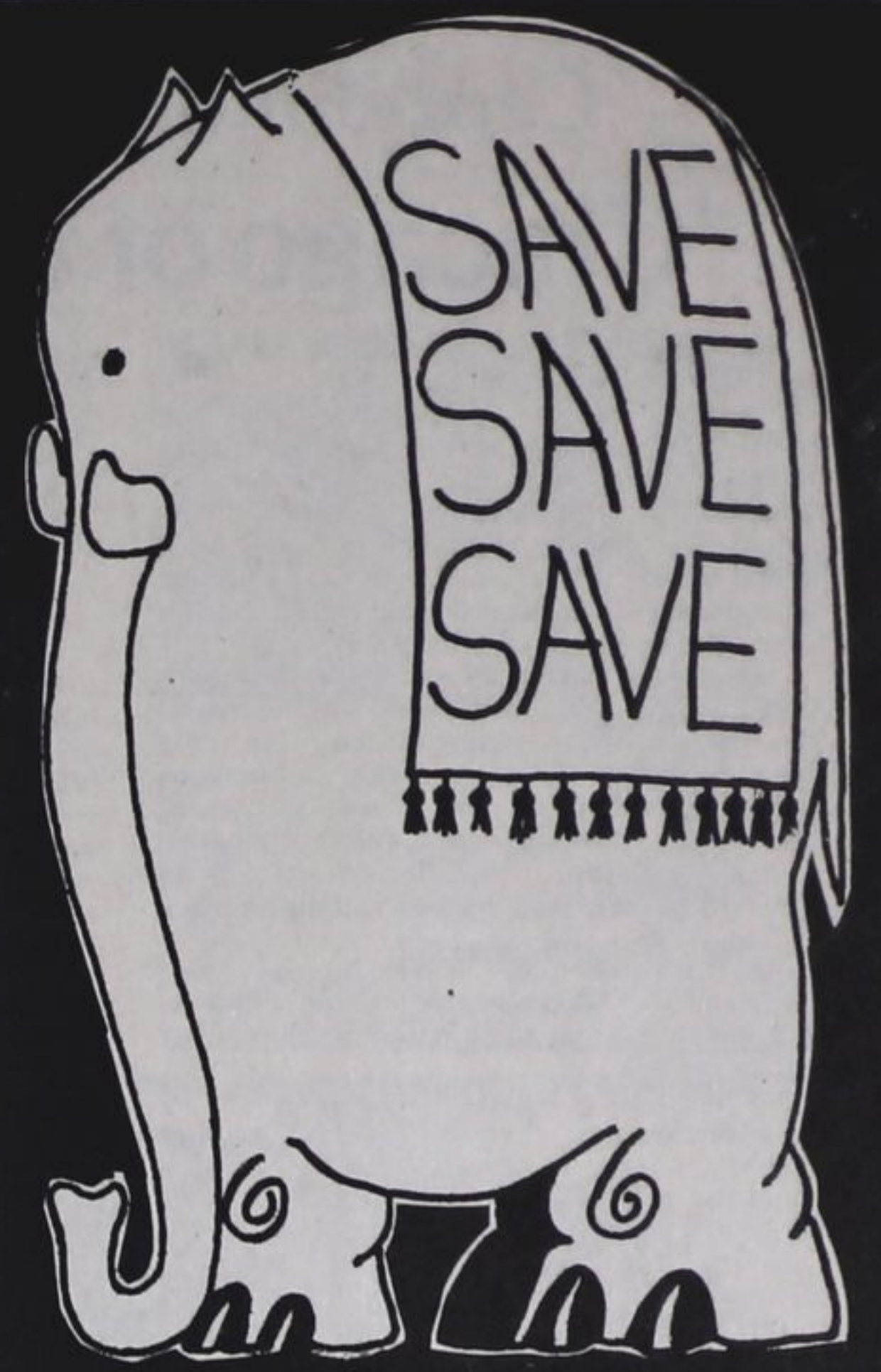
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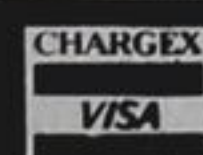
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