

Cops hit Markham, Whitchurch-Stouffville pot houses

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Staff Writer

More than \$1 million dollars in marijuana plants were seized by York Regional Police during raids on two homes in Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville.

In Whitchurch-Stouffville, police were called in to a \$600,000 marijuana lab in the Preston Lake area north of Bloomington Road last week after a landlord changed the locks on a rental home and discovered a hydroponic grow operation.

When officers arrived at the Hilltop Boulevard house, they found more than 600 plants, ballasts, lights with 1000-watt bulbs, and ventilation and exhaust fans.

"They were all very nice plants, ready for harvest," said drug and vice Det. Mike Klimm.

No one was at the home at the time and suspects are still being sought in the case, he said.

It's the second pot lab discovered in Whitchurch-Stouffville in the last six months, with an Ivy Crescent home raided last fall, said Det. Klimm.

"They are moving north, everything is getting pushed to the north," he said, adding part of the reason is because Hydro One, which supplies electricity to Whitchurch-Stouffville and other rural areas, doesn't have an aggressive program to catch people trying to bypass the meter.

"Markham, Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Newmarket, their utilities are very proactive," Det. Klimm said. "If they find a bypass, they turn off the power. Hydro One isn't doing that."

In Markham, more than \$400,000 worth of marijuana was seized from a Highgate Drive home Monday after an anonymous tipster called to report an unusual odour.

The caller told officers he smelled something funny around the house. When police arrived, about noon, a male met them at the door and was reluctant to let them in, said Const. Steve Morrell.

When officers insisted, pointing out the matter could be one of safety, they found three other men inside and a hydroponic grow lab consisting of 331 pot plants and two pounds of dried marijuana.

Holes had been punched in the floors and ceilings for ventilation fans and to bypass the hydro meter, Const. Morrell said.

Officers also found nine ballasts, three water pumps, 45 light bulbs, six exhaust fans, timing boards, humidifiers and a quantity of cash.

Const. Morrell said while the house

is a rental property, the owner faces more than \$35,000 in renovation costs after his most recent tenants' modifications.

Holes in the foundation, roof and floors need repair, the electrical system must be inspected and deemed safe and humidifiers have likely damaged the wood, he said.

Four men, all from Scarborough, aged 42, 48, 49 and 61, stand charged with various drug-related offences, including producing an illegal substance, possession of a controlled substance, theft of telecommunications

and mischief under \$5,000 for the bypass equipment.

Police remind residents to call them at 905-881-1221, ext. 7500 or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS, if they notice anything unusual about neighbouring homes, including these signs:

- a house seems abandoned or people are coming and going at odd hours;
- windows are covered over at all times;
- lights are on 24 hours a day;
- you don't know the neighbours, or have never seen them around.



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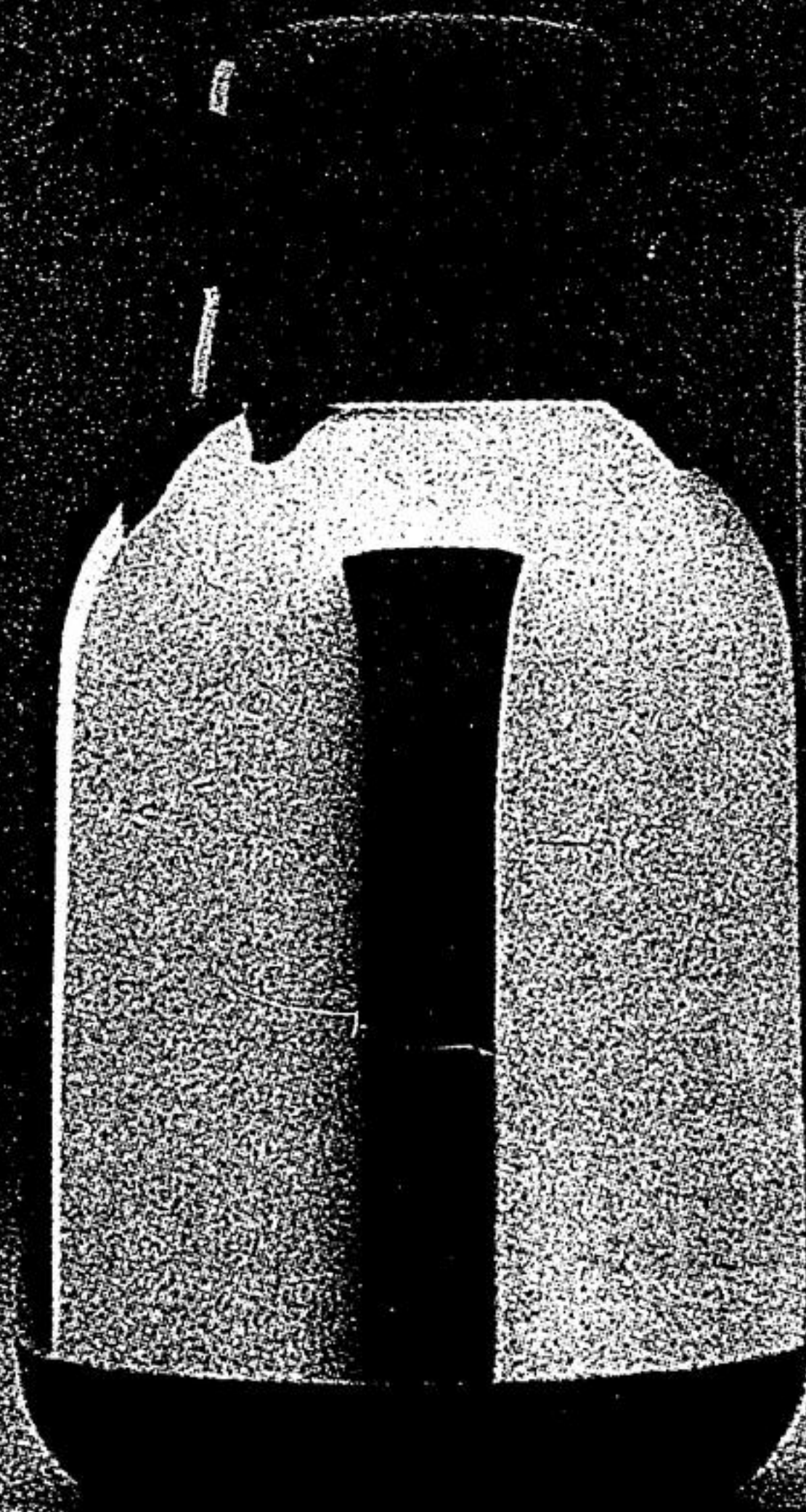
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All winning teachers will be entered in the Teacher of the Year contest.

Entries detailing why the teacher deserves the honour should be no longer than 150 words. Be sure to include your name, telephone number and school.

Deadline for April entries is 5 p.m. April 11

Entries may be dropped off at the Economist & Sun, 9 Heritage Rd., Markham, or the Tribune, 34 Civic Ave, Stouffville. Or you can e-mail us at editor@stouffvillesun.com.



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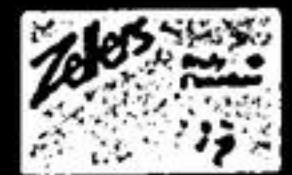
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