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Arson killed Whitchurch-Stouffville horses

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

Arson has been identified as the cause of a fire that killed eight horses in a blaze in Whitchurch-Stouffville in late April.

While investigators with the Ontario Fire Marshal's Office (OFMO) have determined that the April 25 blaze on Vivian Sideroad was intentionally set, no criminal charges have been laid, reported lead OFMO investigator Robert Young.

York Regional Police and the OFMO are continuing the investigation, said Mr. Young. The OFMO's forensic investigation has been ongoing while the police have also been involved since the fire took place, explained Mr. Young.

None of the horses on the farm survived the blaze. However, two dogs managed to escape the burning stables.

The fire devastated property owner Athena Dunn. The horses were her pets.

With no available water in the area, the fire departments dispatched five tanker and bumper fire trucks, running shuttles to the blaze.

As well, 20 firefighters from the Central York Fire Services and the Whitchurch-Stouffville Fire Department responded.

In addition to claiming the lives of the horses, the fire destroyed a workshop, an office and a barn containing four stables.

York police buy new chopper

BY JEFF MITCHELL
Staff Writer

Police will continue to patrol the skies of York Region, thanks to the purchase of a new helicopter.

Regional councillors gave the nod to the purchase just before breaking for the summer.

A new helicopter purchase had been budgeted for 2003, but the availability of the right aircraft at the right price prompted the decision to move it up a year, said Dave Barrow, police services board chairperson.

"It's perfect," said Mr. Barrow, a Richmond Hill councillor.

York police will spend \$1.25 million on the Eurocopter EC120, to be purchased from Eurocopter of Fort Erie. Funds for the purchase will be raised through the issue of debentures.

The force will receive \$480,000 as a trade-in on the chopper it has flown for the past two years. That aircraft was donated to the York force.

"While it was a wonderful gift, after operating it for two years, it did have some drawbacks operating as a police helicopter 24/7," Mr. Barrow said.

The new chopper, which has logged just 100 hours of flying time, will be ideally suited to the heavy and varied use the police force demands of a helicopter, he said.

Support from regional council and the police services board reaffirmed political support for the police chopper patrol program.

"We've had great success with it," Mr. Barrow said. "It has allowed us to operate differently in some aspects."

The helicopter has been used in numerous calls, ranging from missing persons incidents to the tracking of suspects. As the program has developed, police have come to rely heavily on their airborne contingent.