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17 Diversions: Is the stuff dreams are made of garbage or reality?

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EMS looks to Memphis to speed up responses

Booming U.S. city had similar problems

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

Joe Holley, medical director for Tennessee Emergency Medical Services, sympathizes with overburdened York Region paramedics.

Until two years ago, Mr. Holley was dealing with similar complaints in Memphis and the fast-growing counties surrounding the city.

NO QUICK FIX

But Memphis turned its problem around and now York EMS officials are looking to America's 18th largest city to determine if strategies used there can be adapted to relieve the region's overburdened ambulance service.

"There isn't going to be a quick fix but we have to change the way we're doing things," said Brad Meekin, York's EMS general manager.

"It is a complicated issue. But it is encouraging to hear people have successes. I plan on giving Memphis EMS a call because I would like to know more about it."

AMBULANCES SHOP AROUND

After responding to emergencies, Mr. Holley said ambulance attendants were forced to "shop around" among crowded emergency rooms to see if any were willing to accept patients.

See REDIRECT, page 10.

ONTARIO POLICE CHIEFS WANT MINIMUM TWO-YEAR SENTENCE

Jail pot growers, chief says

BY MARTIN DERBYSHIRE
Staff Writer

With the number of marijuana grow operations reaching "epidemic proportions," York Region's top cop wants mandatory minimum sentences for anyone convicted of cultivating the cash crop.

"There are automatic sentences for crimes involving firearms. We need minimum sentences for mar-

ijuana grow labs and they have got to be substantive," York Regional Police Chief Armand La Barge told the Rotary Club of Markham Sunrise at a meeting Wednesday morning.

"We have to let these people know they're not just going to walk away with house arrest."

Chief La Barge's push is being backed by chiefs across the

province urging the federal government to bring in minimum sentences of two years as a deterrent for marijuana growers.

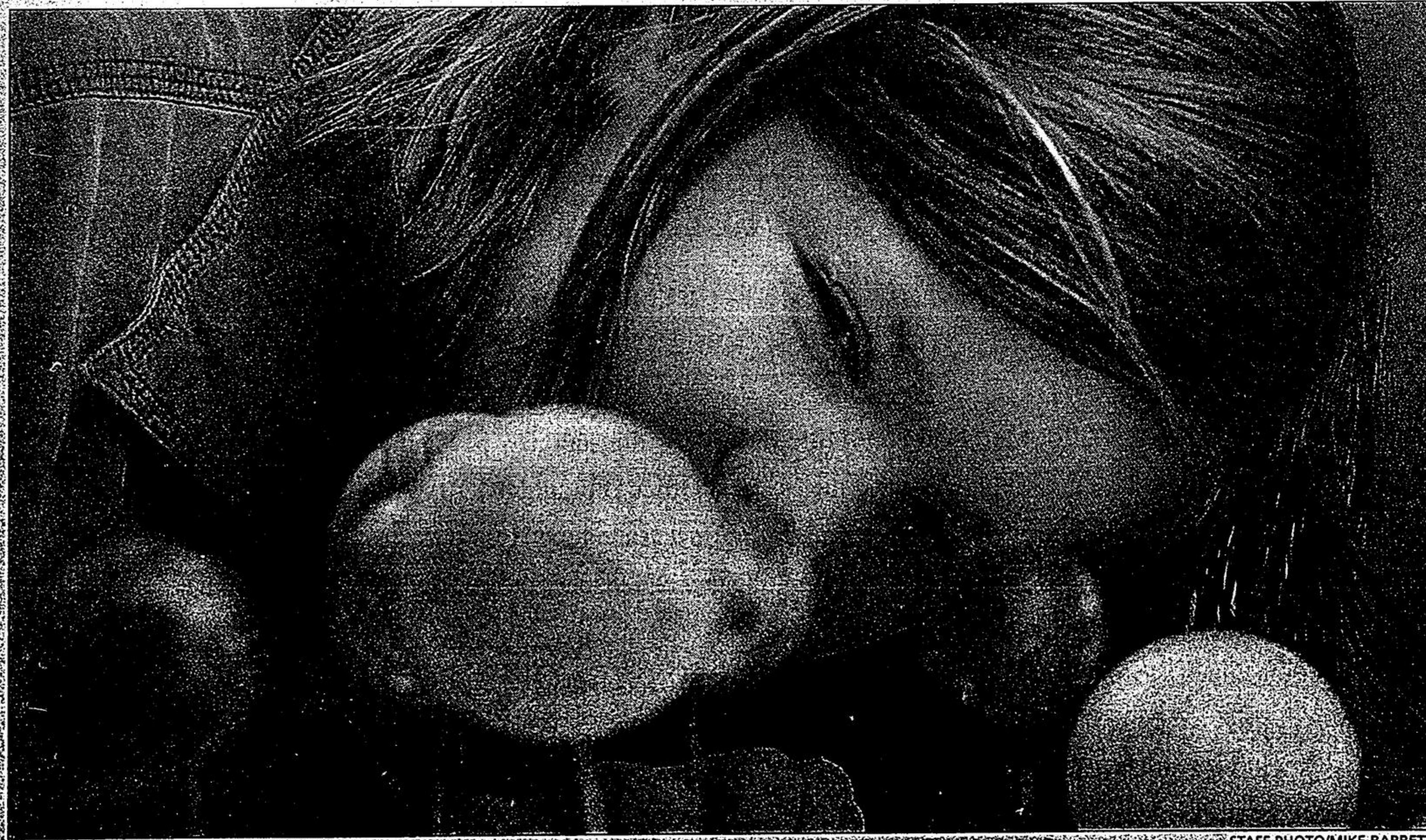
"The judicial system must implement tougher sentences and assurance that judges will impose these stiffer penalties," said a January 2004 Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police report on grow operations. "Grow ops are a serious

threat to the public and police officers."

The association claims there are now more than 15,000 operations in Ontario, up 250 per cent over the past three to five years.

In York Region alone, 173 pot labs were raided in 2003, up from 170 the year before. Police made 136 arrests, laid 342 charges and

See GROWING, page 7.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

PLANETARY PLAY

Mary Kate Spencer, 9, checks the alignment of planets in her solar system model at We're Going to Mars, a March break program hosted by the Latcham Gallery in Stouffville Tuesday. School is back in Monday.

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