

Sun-Tribune

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York Region Media
Group community
newspapers

The Sun-Tribune, published every Thursday and Saturday, is a division of the Metroland Media Group Ltd., a wholly owned subsidiary of Torstar Corporation. The Metroland family of newspapers is comprised of more than 100 community publications across Ontario. The York Region Media Group includes The Liberal, serving Richmond Hill and Thornhill, Newmarket Era, Aurora Banner, Vaughan Citizen, Markham Economist & Sun, Stouffville Sun-Tribune, Georgina Advocate, Bradford West Gwillimbury Topic, beingwell and yorkregion.com

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The Sun-Tribune welcomes your letters. All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The Sun-Tribune reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space.

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OPINION

Stouffville
Sun-Tribune

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Editorial

Longer sentences for police killers

Policing is a profession in which a seemingly simple action can have the most tragic of consequences.

Our community was reminded of this last week when we lost York Regional Police Const. Garrett Styles, one of the brave souls who, day in and day out, work to keep us safe. His death leaves a gaping wound in a force still reeling from a similar loss just four years ago.

The 32-year-old, seven-year veteran of one of Canada's largest police forces was cut down June 28 in the prime of his life, leaving behind two young children, a wife, family and wounded brethren of fellow officers who will continue to serve and protect. His bravery, dedication and honour — right to the end — will never be forgotten.

But who holds responsibility for ensuring the safety of our men and women in blue? To a great degree, it falls on our police officers themselves, who, through training and watching each others' backs, strive to make it home safely at the end of each shift.

Our justice system also plays a key role, with strict rules ensuring an added deterrent when a police officer is killed. Yet, in this respect, the system is failing.

When a person is accused of killing a police officer, the charge is automatically upgraded to first-degree murder. Yet it is difficult for prosecutors to make this charge stick, as it can be downgraded by a jury during a finding of guilt.

Look no further than the tragic death just four years ago of York Regional Police Det.-Const. Robert Plunkett. The circumstances of his death are eerily similar to the tragedy that befell Const. Styles. A week ago Wednesday, the day after Const. Styles was killed, an Ontario judge sent Det.-Const. Plunkett's killer to federal prison for the senseless death.

After being charged with first-degree murder, Nadeem Jiwa, who was 19 when he crushed the officer with his car, was convicted of manslaughter. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison, but with two-for-one credit for time served in pre-trial custody, will serve only an additional 50 months.

That's not nearly long enough. This newspaper supported the elimination last year of the two-for-one sentencing credits, but because Jiwa was charged before that, former sentencing rules applied. As a result, he'll go free in barely four years.

Changes to our Criminal Code are in order. We should scrap the automatic bump-up to first-degree murder and replace it with an automatic additional sentence beyond what a judge issues.

Another 10 years behind bars would be a good start.



Letters to the Editor

No excuse for dumping trash on town's rural roads

I have lived in Stouffville for most of my life and have always been proud to call it home.

Having said that, I would like to address the noticeable trash accumulation and increased dumping of large articles in rural areas.

Walking along Bethesda Road this spring, I was shocked at the amount and type of litter and debris that had accumulated in the ditches during the winter and has continued to appear.

This road is now home to Bethesda Park. As such, it is used by many people and should reflect a positive image both of the town and its residents.

The idea of parkland and trash is not compatible. There is no excuse for pitching coffee cups, fast-food wrappers/bags, bottles, patio stones, building materials and plumbing. Yes, there have been toilets and sinks.

I am hesitant to believe the same people throwing out their trash on rural roads would consider doing this in the town itself. Why is it then these same people think it is acceptable on a rural road?

The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville is to be commended on its many efforts to establish and maintain an attractive community.

Beautiful hanging baskets decorate our Main Street. Merchants have made noticeable efforts to create appealing storefronts. Waste disposal bins are situated throughout the town and its parks.

Stouffville is a longtime, successful participant in recycling and green initiatives. As a teacher, I know firsthand local schools are heavily involved in green initiatives and we should all be extremely proud of the ongoing efforts our children are making to keep their

HAVE YOUR SAY

► What do you think of these issues or others? E-mail letters to the editor to jmason@yrmg.com

environment clean while reducing waste.

The conscientious efforts of many individuals are being tainted by the actions of a small group of people who have a blatant disregard for others and our community.

The next time you are driving along a rural road, whether it be in our community or any other, think twice before you toss your trash or dump your large items and debris.

What kind of example are you setting for the next generation? Who are you expecting to clean up your garbage?

If it's not something you want to see on your own road or in front of your own home, then it does not belong on other roads or in front of someone else's home either.

L. MCGUCKIN
STOUFFVILLE

So proud of stolen signs

I just wanted to thank the people who wrecked the post and stole my name and address signs off my front lawn on Dorman Drive.

It happened last Thursday about midnight.

My 78-year-old father just hung the last sign about a week before and we were so proud of them.

I hope these people get as much enjoyment out of them as we did.

GAYLE DUNN
STOUFFVILLE



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

Better life rocked by vandals

Esther and Shawn Kim and their two youngsters moved from South Korea to Canada for a better life in 2005.

They took over the popular Basically Bagels on Main Street four years ago and moved to Stouffville. Life has been good, in spite of constant 12-hour shifts, six days a week at their friendly eatery.

It's old school. Smiling customers call them by name. Regulars who order "the usual" are not disappointed. Everybody from students to downtown doctors, and seniors to construction workers.

"Our town is very quiet," Mr. Kim said as the last of Monday's customers filed out. "People are very nice."

He wasn't of that opinion early one June 25. The couple arrived at work to find their large flower boxes empty and the prized annuals and soil strewn across the sidewalk.

In the grand scheme, vandalism is not first-degree murder. Petunias can be re-planted. Signs (see letter on this page) can be replaced. Same goes for hood ornaments, garden gnomes and mail boxes.

But it's a violation that hits home like a right hook to the mid-section, especially in a town so free of crime. It's so very personal.

(And it's not always youths to blame. Like the adult in a group leaving a late-night fundraiser at Latham Hall who decided to kick a restaurant's trash into the street.)

"Customers are very upset — some cried," said Mr. Kim, who shot video and stills of the damage.

York Regional Police were e-mailed. Someone spotted a group of 10 to 20 young people wandering through the downtown core early that same morning.

"It's a problem, a big problem," said Mr. Kim, whose restaurant has been hit before. "Kids need to be educated."

Jim Mason is editor of The Sun-Tribune.