

Organized crime rooted in region

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When it comes to organized crime, police face a dilemma.

They can stay mum, which they are prone to do, or use the media to share information with the hope of learning more about the people involved.

However, sharing information can have the opposite effect. Making a big splash about the underworld can encourage gangsters to fly low, stifling investigations.

With the bust of a popular GTA gambling website and massive Markham Super Bowl party Sunday and the recent focus on corruption, kickbacks and the Cosa Nostra at the Charbonneau inquiry into the mob's political ties in Quebec, police were left with little choice.

A Vaughan man and five others from around the Golden Horseshoe were charged with bookmaking, participating in a criminal organization, keeping a gaming house and conspiracy to commit an indictable offence, police announced Monday.

SUPER BOWL BUST

During a two-year investigation, police recovered \$2.5 million in gambling funds they said would eventually end up funding extortion, drug trafficking, prostitution and more.

Police also tied the gambling website, Platinum SB, to "traditional mafia" and the Hells Angels.

They further linked the men and money to the 2004 Toronto shooting of Louise Russo, which police suspect involved the Hells Angels and Sicilian mafia.

Much of the media attention has focused

on York Region, particularly Woodbridge, where many of Ontario's mobsters are suspected of living.

We have all read about mobsters, some of whom live in our community as the release of mob boss Vito Rizzuto and his possible relocation to Vaughan made news.

CRIME FAMILIES ACTIVE

Although numbers are hard to nail down, according to Det.-Sgt. Alvaro Almeida, head of intelligence at York Regional Police, the 30 men wanted in Ontario by Italian authorities is a good indicator of how widespread the problem is.

In terms of money, he once again said it is hard to quantify, but estimated the revenue as a result of organized crime in the province at between \$300 million and \$1 billion.

However, police are sure of one thing — all three of the world's biggest crime families are actively working in Vaughan and throughout York Region, including the infamous Sicilian Cosa Nostra, 'Ndrangheta, from Calabria and the Camorra, from Naples.

They are joined by motorcycle gangs, such as the Hells Angels, and other ethnic-based groups, according to Det.-Sgt. Almeida.

"We can say there is a centralization in Vaughan," Det.-Sgt. Almeida said. "But they're dispersed throughout the GTA and beyond."

They could live in one jurisdiction and have their business in another. Crime knows no bounds.

"They don't use Steeles (Avenue) as a border between York Region and Toronto like we do."

To read the complete story, go to yorkregion.com.



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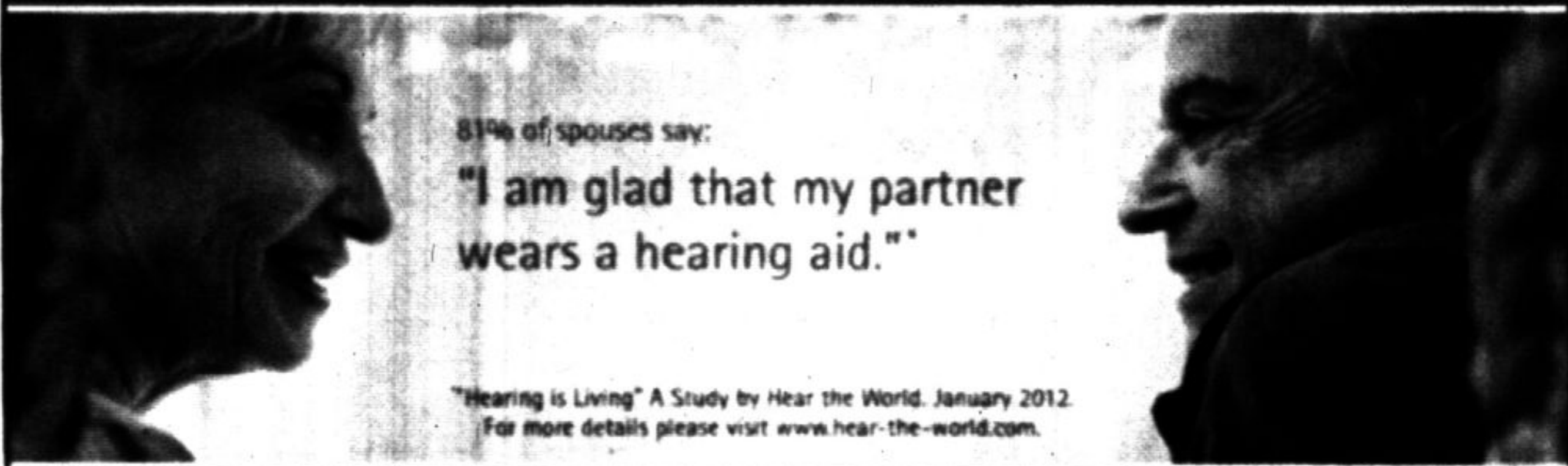
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