

Caledon OPP concentrating on partnerships and engaging youth

By Bill Rea

There are a lot of demands on the resources of Caledon OPP, meaning there has to be priority an focus.

Inspector Tim Melanson, commander of detachment, recently provided an update on the state of policing in Town, pointing out the detachment held four community focus groups over the last year, as well as seeking input from other sources. They revealed three main areas where people believe the police should be focusing their efforts ? property crimes, traffic safety and trouble with youth. He said the Street Crime Unit and Major Crime Unit have been focusing on things from graffiti to violence, as well as crime reduction. With the rapidly growing population in Caledon, it's important that these units keep an eye on the progression of crime and keep changing their responses to occurrences.

In terms of crime, Caledon continues to rank below the provincial average for occurrences. In Ontario, there were 833 violent crimes reported per 100,000 population in 2013, but only 426 in Caledon. The rate of overall crime (not counting traffic offences) shows there were 1,806 occurrences reported in Caledon per 100,000 population, compared with 3,678 across Ontario in ?13. And the Crime Severity Index, in which each offence is weighted according to sentences from the courts, shows Caledon's numbers are a lot lower than the average for other communities across Ontario, including Orangeville, Dufferin County, the rest of Peel and York Region.

Melanson asserted that Caledon remains one of the safest communities in North America.

?I was very proud at these numbers,? he told councillors. ?We continue to move forward.?

He said the Community Response Unit is a ?great unit? with six staff that provides support to other units. They are involved with proactive policing, warrant execution, RIDE, bike and foot patrols, patrol and enforcement of Hot Spots and public education.

Melanson stressed the importance of getting out and being visible in the community.

He also said the detachment has a unit dedicated to traffic enforcement, including dealing with Hot Spots (stretches of road deemed to require more enforcement), commercial motor vehicle inspections, OPP?initiatives over long weekends and holidays, joining in enforcement over the entire Highway 10 corridor, etc.

The number of traffic tickets handed out in Caledon was down by a little more than 2,000 in 2013 compared to 2012, but it looked like there was a trend to see an increase for ?14 (Melanson had figures only until October). There were 95 stunt driving charges laid in ?13, and by October, Melanson said they had passed the 100 mark for ?14.

He also said there is a full Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere (RIDE) team out every day. ?It's a great program and it's working,? he said.

Melanson also said the detachment has six officers trained to inspect commercial motor vehicles like trucks. There were a number of enforcement blitzes over the year, and the numbers were up from 2013. They stopped 2,577 trucks, and inspected 682 of them, as of October. There were a little more than 2,618 charges laid and 342 trucks were taken out of service.

Melanson said there will be more locally based blitzes in 2015

He also told Councillor Nick deBoer these blitzes will stop just about ever truck passing through the area, but not all of them. He added officers are well-trained and know what they're looking for when it comes to a truck that's not road-worthy.

In terms of traffic accidents, the numbers seem to be down from the 2013 totals according to the 2014 numbers up to October. There had been five fatalities to that point, and Melanson said they are always hard for everyone to deal with.

Melanson who is completing his first year in Caledon, said he's been looking for ways to make the local police more visible, though the use of things like bike and foot patrols.

He also stressed the need for partnerships within the community, commenting that has started with council. He added there are several programs police take part in; many of which are run by volunteers.

He cited the 25-member auxiliary unit, that in the last year has contributed more than 5,700 hours and attended over 70 events, such as the recent Santa Claus Parade in Bolton and regular child car seat clinics.

Other partnerships involve such groups as the Children's Aid Society, Caledon Citizens on Patrol, Crown Attorney's Office, Caledon Graffiti Hotline, HomeJames, Lock it or Lose it, Policing Advisory Council of Caledon (PACC), Road?Watch, Victim Services, etc. ?It's a treat to work with these organizations,? he said.

Melanson also commented on the importance of engaging youth as one of the main items on his list. He said there's been a disconnect over the last couple of years, and he's working to fix that, citing a number of programs.

He also said the detachment is concentrating on communicating with the community, through media releases, information sessions, etc. He praised the work of acting Sergeant Brenda Evans, who he called a ?media guru.?

?She's out there all the time,? he said.

Councillor Doug Beffort asked about the status of the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program in the schools.

Melanson said there's only one officer at the detachment trained to teach it and he's off. They're trying to get a replacement, and hope to have one when the next course starts in April.

He also told Belfort they are looking at a proactive approach for dealing with gravel trucks, especially in Ward 1. He added the main concern are with operators from outside of town.

?This is a report we should all be proud of,? Councillor Rob Mezzapelli declared, adding he was very impressed with Melanson's data and the efforts to engage the community. ?I know this doesn't just happen.?