

Police hear concerns from SouthFields Village residents

By Bill Rea

Caledon OPP has completed its series of public meetings on its business plan, and traffic issues remain high on the list of priorities. The final meeting in the process was held recently at SouthLake Village Public School, and the comments coming from it indicate concerns are basically consistent throughout Caledon.

"We want to hear from you," Sergeant Mike Garant told the audience.

He pointed out the detachment went through a similar exercise about three years ago. There were only three public sessions held that time, but he said they added the fourth in SouthFields, recognizing it's a new community that could be experiencing certain growing pains.

As he had at the previous three sessions, Garant said the exercise will be setting the priorities for the next three, years, which is why the public input was important.

"You can only be really good at a few things," he said, explaining the need to establish what has priority.

Garant said the priorities three years ago were traffic safety and enforcement, crime prevention and police visibility.

Terry Fast of the Policing Advisory Council of Caledon (PACC) pointed to the Road Watch program, which has been operating in town for several years, and the impact it's had on getting drivers to be more careful.

He also pointed to the work being done by the Restorative Justice Committee of PACC, pointing out this is one of the few policing jurisdictions around with such a program.

The committee is made up of volunteers, who were trying to find alternatives to the court system. The program is used only on first offenders who show remorse for their infractions. In such a case, Fast said an officer is able to steer the case toward restorative justice.

"It's a win, win, win," he said, pointing out it can help save an offender from getting a record and giving that person the chance to make restitution. As well, he said it offers a chance for the victim to get an explanation as to why it happened.

Fast also mentioned Caledon Citizens on Patrol, which has been operating about 10 years.

But Garant observed that most of the concerns being raised at the meeting involved traffic issues.

He pointed out there is a lot of commuter traffic from outside Caledon passing through town every day. That issue has been increasing and he said it will keep growing.

"We'll never achieve 100 per cent safety," he said.

Garant told the meeting the number of calls for service that they receive has been declining, calling that a good thing. He explained that helps free up officers to address other priorities, like traffic. He said that about 19 per cent of the calls they receive from Mayfield West and southwest Chinguacousy are traffic related.

There are still issues of community safety, especially when it comes to homes, cars and property. Garant stressed the need for people to report incidents to them, although he added there are steps they can take to protect themselves. Making sure they lock their vehicles is one of them.

He said theft from unlocked cars is a problem all over. There years ago, he said the trend was for high-end items to be taken, but that's been changing, as thieves look for something that's easy to grab.

"If it's free and it's easy, they will take it," he said, adding thieves are looking for unlocked vehicles.

There were problems about two years ago in the SouthFields area, while the homes were being constructed. Garant said the developer hired a security force to monitor the situation, and police were able to make a lot of arrests as a result.

"Everything that wasn't tied down was being stolen," Garant recalled, adding thieves will run down a street, checking every car to see if it's unlocked. He added victims are often reluctant to report such incidents because they're embarrassed.

There were other concerns raised at the meeting, such as littering. Again, Garant urged people to report it if they see it.



Sergeant Mike Garant addressed the audience at SouthFields Village Public School recently.