

Multicultural community feels safe in Halton

Anti-hate forum survey reveals

BY HOWARD MOZEL • Special to the Post

While 78 per cent of respondents to a Halton Multicultural Council (HMC) survey feel safe in their community, Police Chief Ean Algar is determined to keep it that way.

Algar made that commitment during Wednesday night's Partners Against Hate initiative promoting the importance of reporting hate crimes to police. The crowd, largely visible minorities, appreciated his resolve and appeared eager to forge further alliances with police and other stakeholders.

"I am glad to be part of this gathering," said Burlington businessman Nabil Harb. "It is a step in the right direction."

Halton Sikh Cultural Association president Sansar Singh Rai, who called Wednesday's forum a "noble cause," added: "Everyone should understand, love and work together. I am honoured to be part of this group today."

That spirit of co-operation was music to Algar's ears, since he explained that keeping Halton safe is a responsibility that rests on everyone's shoulders, not just law enforcement.

"We place significant value on our relations with the community," said Algar, who added that all hate crimes in Halton — six to 12 a year on average — are brought to his attention within hours.

According to HMC managing director Sophia Makridis, the

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Few victims of hate crime report incidents to police

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survey was circulated in the Muslim, Sikh and Hindu communities and determined that 23 per cent of respondents said they had been a victim of a hate crime, 69 per cent said they had not.

Only 16 per cent of those who said yes, however, reported it to police while the vast majority did not.

Like Algar, Deputy Police Chief Gary Crowell said hate crimes remain a "high priority" with the service despite being difficult to solve for several reasons, including their random nature,

lack of witnesses and low rates of reporting. Turning a blind eye, though, only makes the problem worse.

"Halton is a safe community, but we're not immune," said Crowell, referring to the 1990 Ku Klux Klan rally in Georgetown that prompted the creation of the North Halton Cultural Awareness Council.

According to Canadian Race Relations Foundation executive director, Dr. Karen Mock, all incidents — whether or not they meet the legal definition of a hate crime — should be reported since these incidents can reveal

the pattern of "something brewing."

"The key is working together," she said.

This is often easier said than done, Mock continued, since victims can be reluctant to report hate crimes for fear of reprisal or being blamed. Many assume nothing will be done anyway.

While people of colour are the prime targets, Mock said, anyone can be a victim, including religious minorities, gays and lesbians. As a result, it is in everyone's best interest to remain vigilant.

"Hate crimes hurt not just individual victims, but the entire community," added Crowell.

According to Assistant Crown Attorney Jim Coppolino, one of the "great Canadian societal

values" is tolerance, so laws have been created in order to deter intolerance. That can be a tough balancing act, but with everyone's help, strides can be made.

In keeping with the partnership theme of the evening, Coppolino encouraged the crowd to mobilize against hate and refuse to be silent. As a political force, he continued, and make the issue a public one to affect change and to "light a fire under the ass of Crown Attorney-like me."

By all means report incidents, Coppolino said, since the courts and the police won't be able to best deal with the issue if they don't have the experience of investigating and prosecuting hate crimes.

In addition to the survey, the HMC and police recently launched phase one of the program by distributing an information pamphlet which explains what a hate motivated crime is, what to do if you are a victim of hate and the importance to contacting police.

Translated into several languages (French, Arabic, Urdu, Punjabi) the brochure is part of an information sharing and fact-finding effort designed to educate residents while allowing police a glimpse inside the community's hopes and its fears.

"Leave here confident that the police do care," said diversity officer Const. Diane Hendry, who told the crowd that she hopes the brochure stays in their drawer and that they never have to call police.

2002- A survey conducted by HMC measured feelings of safety in the community. Halton Regional Police Chief Ean Algar made a commitment to promote the importance of reporting hate crimes to the police through the Partners Against Hate initiative.

30th
Anniversary

Halton
Multicultural Council