

2005 a 'benchmark' year in graffiti eradication

by Heinz Kuck

Most people reflect and take stock of organizational and personal achievements at the end of each year and into the beginning of the next, analyzing what was done right (or wrong) and whether they reached their goals and objectives.

2005 became known in Toronto as a banner year for eradicating graffiti. We completed our five-year blueprint and reached each of our program goals, achieving a benchmark of cleaning, reclaiming and revitalizing more than one million square feet of previously vandalized surface. We solidified partnerships, not only in Toronto but across the country.

I have come to know and respect over the past five years a great many organizations and individuals who have responded to the clarion call of graffiti eradication. I have enjoyed travelling across this great country presenting our award-winning Toronto Police Program, forging new friendships and sharing values and ideas.

While in Vancouver I was impressed by the investigative inroads Constables Valerie Spicer and Elizabeth Miller have achieved. Saskatoon has one of Canada's leading authorities on application of search warrants and graffiti paraphernalia – Cst. Lee Jones.

Toronto Transit Commission Special Cst. Craig Wright, probably a bloodhound in his previous incarnation, continually tracks down prolific taggers. Peel Region boasts Cst. Thomas McKay, with his encyclopedic knowledge of CPTED and, of course, Halifax has put together a stellar community response team with the likes of Gary Martin, Jane Nauss, Brian Theriault and Peter Myatt.

A cast of thousands across Canada have raised the quality of life in their communities through tireless efforts toward eradicating graffiti. There are too many to mention but I tip my hat to each and every one. Be proud in the knowledge that you make a tremendous difference.

I'm also pleased to recognize outstanding performance in Ontario where, for the past two years, I've had the honour of presenting the Toronto Police Service Annual Graffiti Eradication Award at the *Blue Line Magazine* Trade Show.

I presented awards last April to Niagara Region Police Service Cst. Joanne Carter and Didi Martin, coordinator of Windsor Crime Prevention, for their achievements in graffiti abatement. Generally we present just one such honour, but having assessed numerous police services and community agencies, our panel of judges ranked Niagara and Windsor equal. Congratulations!

Windsor's 'Wipe Out Graffiti' program began in the spring of 2003 after citizens began expressing concerns about graffiti, says Martin. "Windsor Crime Prevention and Windsor Police Community Services Branch partnered in spearheading an initiative to pursue a strategy that addressed the proliferation," she explains.

Organizers consulted with key political and business people and police services throughout North America. "This assisted in the de-



Cst Joanne Carter (left), S/Sgt. Heinz Kuck, and Didi Martin.

velopment of our own program, including an amended property standards bylaw. The implementation of these strategies resulted in numerous accomplishments, such as educating citizens and community groups about graffiti, increasing the number of charges, forming working partnerships with various agencies, developing a suspect data base and promoting crime prevention measures."

The program has led to "huge advances" in eradicating and controlling graffiti, she adds. "Areas once considered problematic have now been transformed into spaces where property owners take pride in maintaining graffiti free buildings."

Efforts in Niagara Region have been equally successful. The Niagara Graffiti Eradication Program began in the spring of 2002 to counter

a surge of graffiti vandalism, says Carter.

"We researched various pieces of literature and spoke to several other police services to assess what other programs existed. Our Niagara program focuses on eradication, education and enforcement strategies, with an emphasis on vibrant community partnerships."

Community members took a sense of pride and ownership in cleaning up their wards, she says, leading to 410 structures cleaned in five wards in 2004 alone "by passionate anti-graffiti community members," she explains.

"Having the support of Mayor (Tim) Rigby and city council has also been important to show the community that the responsibility of a cleaner, safer city is one that is shared. Niagara Region has successfully come together in this endeavour and, together with our police service – the community at large, the media, various agencies, faith communities and local politicians – have all shouldered some responsibility in this program."

Both Martin and Carter have done remarkably well and I know that they continue to work hard in their respective jurisdictions.

Will you lead your community this year by participating in a graffiti eradication program? I know I will; let's head to the streets and take them back one wall at a time!

Please join me at the upcoming 2006 *Unmasking Urban Graffiti III*, where once again we showcase and honour another service or agency devoted to community reclamation through graffiti eradication.

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