

Michipicoten Police Force Claims Highest Detection Rate In Canada During The Last Four Years

by D. E. Pugh

21 May, 1975

"Police Protect Property" is the theme of this week's Michipicoten police week. In a recent interview, Staff Sergeant Ed Hay, Wawa policeman for the last six years pointed out that "the primary duty of the police force is to protect citizens, while property comes second". This job is not easy. Because of domestic disputes and alcohol, Sergeant Hay has been shot at five times and hit once during his six years here. Nevertheless he enjoys his work because it deals with people. "Although much police work deals with the detection of crime", it was stated, "an essential part of police work is the prevention of crime". Michipicoten policemen are willing to talk with residents, and friendly discussions with those depressed or frustrated often avoids suicides, particularly during the worst hours, 3 to 4:30 in the morning.

"Last month there were fifty-one criminal investigations brought to court", Sergeant Hay pointed out. "This number equals the number of prosecutions in Toronto". The community is a peculiar one, unusual for a very high crime rate for a registered population of 4,800. "Michipicoten" it was added, "has more crime than most large cities per population ratio with the exception of Montreal or Vancouver". Most of this crime is committed by Wawa adults, while Mr. Kennedy, the juvenile police officer usually averages only seven prosecutions every three months. Part of the reason for the high crime rate is the transient population, although 'hippies', travelling through usually prove to be law abiding. Perhaps the extreme isolation of the town, combined with a long cold winter, and notable lack of recreational resources creates a psychic pressure driving unstable individuals to crime.

Drugs is another problem which involves almost seventy per cent of a narcotics officer's time. Although Michipicoten police know both "pushers" and "users" in town, drug charges are very difficult to prove 'beyond a shadow of a doubt'. 1970 marked Michipicoten's worst drug year, and from 1973 to 1974 there has been an 800 per cent increase in successful prosecutions of drug related offences. This increase was caused by the transfer to the municipality in January, 1973 of power to enforce the narcotics act. "The percentage of drug users for the population here" Sergeant Hay noted, "is somewhat higher than most cities of equivalent size". This is because Wawa is the local distribution point for Northern Ontario. Drugs are brought to Wawa by the A.C.R., two major highways, boat, or by sea or land based plane, and are transferred to such centres as White River, and Chapleau. "There are no hard drugs in Wawa" Sergeant Hay added, "partly due to restraint by pushers and partly to a citizens action committee operating outside the bounds of the law". Such a committee, although bound by the law like other citizens, occasionally takes actions against pushers on, less than certain grounds.

Since 1960, when the Township Police was organized with two constables, Wawa's police force has expanded to twelve officers patrolling 182 square miles from the Harbour to High Falls. Being one of the highest paid police forces in Ontario, with salaries beginning at over \$11,000, the Michipicoten force is also one of the most effective. Its record of successful prosecution during the last four years is 72 per cent, the highest detection rate in Canada. With such success it's hoped that local crime rate will soon be reduced.