

Putting the brakes on auto crime



Photo: Dave Ao

YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBOURHOOD AUTO CRIME CHECK

Car audit volunteers Alyssa and Angela can spot an opportunity for thieves from 500 paces.

BY ANDREW NOLAN

People eye us suspiciously as we patrol the Hastings Sunrise parking lot, issuing what look like parking tickets to unsuspecting shoppers. “How long can I park here?” some ask. “What are you guys doing!” others exclaim, more bluntly. Unsurprised by the less than enthusiastic reaction, we explain that our ‘tickets’ are in fact Auto Crime Prevention Audit slips, designed to educate vehicle owners about simple measures they can take to reduce auto crime.

We check for open windows, unlocked doors, and visible property left inside the vehicle, ticking off the appropriate boxes on the slips when we spot anything that could compromise a vehicle’s security. Today, we find most owners have done a good job at securing their vehicles, many receiving a tick in the ‘thanks for helping reduce auto crime’ box. There are, however, a number of unlocked vehicles,

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Officer Christie is on the job

BY GERRY DEAGLE

Cst. Holly Christie steps out of her cruiser at the side of the road and approaches a woman tending to a garden on Wall Street.

Cst. Christie is doing what she loves best about being the new Neighborhood Police Officer (NPO) for the Hastings Sunrise Community Policing Centre. She’s building relationships on a sunny morning, getting to know the everyday people in our community.

A six-year veteran of Vancouver City Police, Holly (she doesn’t mind being addressed by her first name) is a strong supporter of community policing. She’s made it a priority to get out and meet the people who live and work here.

And she plans to “get creative” in the way that crime-related information gets out to businesses on the Hastings strip. Cst. Christie says she’ll be visiting as many local businesses as possible over the next while. She will be working with them to continue to report their

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Photo: Dave Ao



GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Cst. Christie chats with CPC volunteer Dan.

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some with attractive items on display to thieves, and many vehicles are not using anti-theft devices, so we continue, hoping our friendly reminders will help prevent some of the vehicle crime that costs Canadians an estimated \$1 billion every year, according to the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC).

ICBC recommends a number of simple steps you can take to prevent auto crime. Never assume, for instance, that your vehicle is a secure place to store anything. Professional thieves can break into a vehicle in seconds, and desperate criminals

won't think twice about smashing a window for a few dollars worth of property. Thinking about where you park is also important. Highly visible parking locations, well lit and unobstructed by fences or bushes, will be far less attractive to car thieves than a car parked in a dimly-lit, out of the way location.

ICBC also recommends using an anti-theft device – doing so may even reduce your car insurance premiums. Highly visible products such as steering wheel locks will signal to car thieves that your vehicle is not an easy target, and more high tech immobilizer technology will prevent thieves from starting your vehicle by

interrupting electrical connections unless a microchip encoded key is used to start the vehicle. Such technology has ensured that cars with factory installed immobilizers always rank low on ICBC's list of the most stolen vehicles in B.C.

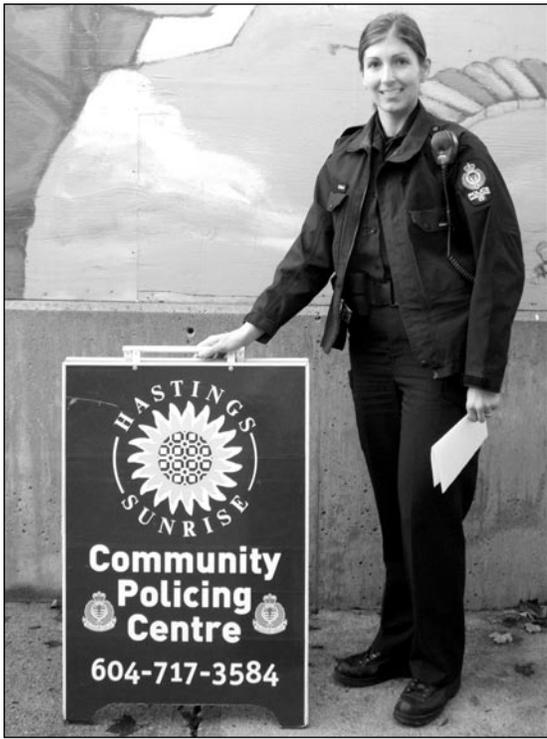
The effects of auto crime go beyond the simple cost and inconvenience caused to vehicle owners. Many stolen autos, especially mini-vans and SUV, are used to commit other crimes such as robberies or break-and-enters before they are dumped by thieves. For more information on what you can do to help reduce auto crime, contact the Hastings Sunrise Community Policing Centre at 604-717-3584.

10 tips to avoid auto crime

- Keep your spare keys in your wallet, not in your car.
- Invest in a good anti-theft device.
- Close windows and lock doors. Take your possessions with you.
- Avoid parking behind fences or hedges.
- At home, light your driveway all night. Elsewhere, park in well-lit areas near pedestrian traffic.
- After opening an automatic gate to underground parking, watch out for thieves waiting to slip inside. Wait for the gate to close behind you.
- Ask an Autoplan broker about the **Combat Auto Theft (CAT)** program. CAT stickers authorize police to question anyone driving your vehicle between 1 and 5am.
- Engrave your stereo and other on-board valuables with your driver's license number.
- Install an anti-theft device to protect your stereo, or buy a unit that's removable and take it with you when you park.
- If you see any suspicious activity near a vehicle, call the police immediately.



Photo: Dave Ao



Officer Christie continued from page 1...

on-going concerns to the community policing centre.

In her previous assignment, as NPO on Commercial Drive at the Grandview-Woodland Community Policing Centre, Holly says she developed good ties with community members. "It's a good way to develop strong community contacts," says the 35-year-old mother of a toddler, whose husband is also a police officer.

"It's not just about handcuffs, and lights and sirens. We get wind of a lot of issues." And she says it is at that stage that problems can be nipped in the bud - before there's a need to push the panic button.

Drop by the Hastings Sunrise Community Policing Centre office to welcome Cst. Christie to her new beat.

UP AND COMING:

ANNOUNCEMENTS & EVENTS

*** Annual General Meeting**

Wednesday, February 7th, at St. James Cottage Hospice, 650 North Penticton St. Meeting starts at 6:30 pm. You must be a member to vote.

*** New Year's Resolution?**

We'll help you keep it with several volunteer programs that will keep you busy and fit - from bike patrol to pooch patrol there's a program for everyone. Call 604-717-3584 to sign up.



Protect your bike from theft



Keep a record of your bike's serial number and advise police if it is stolen.

Don't lock to road signs or bike racks that can be easily unbolted from the the ground.

Avoid locking to materials that that can be cut, like wire fencing, trees, and wooden railings.

Always keep your bicycle locked, even in a garage or on a porch.

Buy the best lock that you can afford.

Avoid dark or isolated parking spots.

Use two locks to secure the frame and both wheels to a solid object.

Remove bags, lights, or quick-release parts. Consider replacing quick-release fasteners with regular bolts.

Position a U-lock so that the keyhole faces down towards the ground. A keyhole that is located in the middle of the straight bar (instead of at the end) offers greater security.

Use two different locks—one for each wheel—so that a thief would need two different types of tools.

Consider riding an inexpensive (beater) bicycle for everyday use and short trips.

Lock to sturdy, immovable objects that are securely bolted. Make sure your bicycle can't be lifted over the object.

Don't buy stolen bikes - that makes you part of the problem.



Tireless volunteer mourned

BY CHESTER GRANT

WANTED – 10, maybe 20 volunteers...to fill the vacancy left at our CPC by just one man.

That is the impact of the passing of an extraordinary volunteer, Patrick McElgunn. Pat died December 1, 2007, after being diagnosed 18 months earlier with ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease).

He touched lives all around him. At his Templeton Street condo, he was the unofficial (and unpaid) fixer of just about everything that went wrong anywhere in the building. On the streets, he and wife Susan were Speed Watch volunteers, operating the laser-gun speed board that warned speeding drivers to slow down and make the streets safer for all of us.

Pat was a board director in the formative years of the Hastings Sunrise Community Policing Centre (HSCPC). He left his stamp, too, on our present office. "Pat's had a hand in just about everything in our office," says coordinator Clair MacGougan. To save precious funds, he found the best products at the best prices and then spent endless hours installing and building them when we first moved in.

Pat liked to talk as much as he liked to help. His infectious cheerfulness permeated our days. Until his illness, he and Susan contributed an average of 100 hours a month to the HSCPC. He was much loved, as a fellow volunteer and as a person.

He had been an accomplished bass guitar player in some prominent Vancouver bands of the 1960s – the Vi-Counts, the Orbits, the Continentals. For many years he ran his own business, building high-quality sound systems for commercial use.

It was typical of Pat: there were great things in life to be heard, whether it was good music or good conversation, and Pat wanted to make sure we heard them.

Through his many contributions to the community, Pat has made life better for thousands of people who never knew him. For those of us who did, it was a special privilege indeed. He will be deeply missed.



WE'LL MISS YOU, PAT
Pat McElgunn's energy and enthusiasm will be missed.

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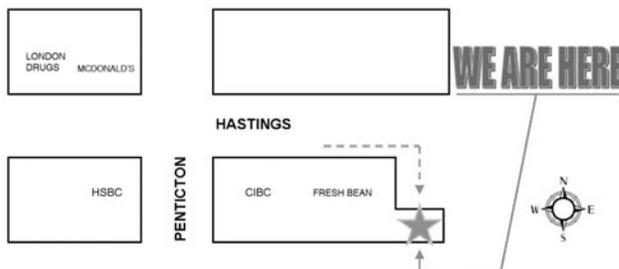
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Hours:

Mondays: 1 – 8 pm
Tuesdays: 9:30 am – 8 pm
Wednesday to Friday:
9:30 am – 4:30 pm
Saturdays: 10 am – 4 pm

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