

STUDENT CRIME STOPPERS PROGRAM

Crime Stoppers of Halton has redesigned its high school program to incorporate the latest technology to create awareness and make it easier for students to provide tips on unsolved crime.

Halton Crime Stoppers coordinator Sergeant Gary Gold, who envisaged and developed the revamped promotional concept, said it's important to utilize the visual medium and communication tools that are being used by young people today.

"It's also vital to let everyone know that Crime Stoppers continues to guarantee anonymity to anyone contacting the tip line whether calling by phone, using an interactive web site or text messaging," Gold said.

During a news conference at Burlington Central High School today, Crime Stoppers of Halton previewed a video presentation that will be used to acquaint students with the Crime Stoppers school program and also unveiled a sign that will be posted in all Halton high schools.

"We want all young people to know they can contact Crime Stoppers if they don't want to directly give information to police," said Gold. "Unfortunately there are criminals and others who are trying to intimidate and convince individuals not to provide information to police that will assist in solving crime."

"Everyone should know that calling Crime Stoppers helps solve crime," he said. The Crime Stoppers message is simple. "If you don't feel comfortable talking to the police, a parent, a teacher or anyone else in authority, you can contact Crime Stoppers."

Gold said Crime Stoppers has been an effective weapon not only in solving crime but in preventing crime since the first program was established in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1976. Since that time, the program has expanded into schools and adopted as part of a safety strategy to protect students from being victimized by the criminal element, he said.

Through the years, Halton has produced pamphlets and made classroom presentations to explain the fundamentals of Crime Stoppers to students, but is now embarking on a high energy visual computer approach to impress the importance of helping police solve crime and keep everyone safe in their school environment.

"Students must understand that all crimes have victims," Gold said. "Obviously Crime Stoppers wants to encourage young people to call if they know anything that will help solve crime," he said. "But they have to know that it's part of being good citizens and is a program that can also help prevent crime. Criminals who fear getting caught will be less likely to take the risk of operating where someone may be watching and possibly calling Crime Stoppers."

The sign being used to promote Crime Stoppers in schools was finalized following a logo contest open to students across the region. The winning design was prepared by Bonita Tsai, a Grade 12 student at Burlington Central High School and she was personally presented with an autographed Toronto Maple Leaf jersey from hockey great Doug Gilmour at the Halton Regional Police Service headquarters' building.

The video presentation, aimed specifically at teenagers, was put together by students from the Interactive Multimedia Program, School of Computing and Information Management, at Sheridan College in Oakville. Gold, who directed the preparation of the video, said the message was designed by students for students.

"The group from Sheridan knew what would attract attention and get the interest of high school students," he said. "We don't have adults lecturing to young people. It's students who have just gone through high school telling those still there what it's like and the respect they should be giving to Crime Stoppers."

Gold said money is still a key motivator for young people and it's no secret Crime Stoppers pays up to \$2,000 for a tip that leads to an arrest. However, he said most people are unaware Crime Stoppers is not part of the police, but operated by a civilian board who are responsible for raising money for the reward fund and promotion of the program through tax deductible charitable donations.

"It is anonymous and in the 30 plus years Crime Stoppers has operated in some 25 countries there has been emphasis on protecting callers from ever being identified," he said. "You can trust the guarantee of anonymity that Crime Stoppers gives."