

Guelph Mercury

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Guelph's core is still safe

On Jan. 31, a particularly troubling incident transpired in Guelph's city centre. According to police, a 57-year-old man was approached in mid-afternoon, after making a withdrawal from a bank-based automated teller machine. The person who approached him, another man, was a stranger. Police say the second man choked the first one unconscious and robbed him of some of the money.

A 29-year-old suspect was charged soon after the brazen crime — a short distance from the scene of the robbery.

That crime has been followed by other, unrelated incidents of theft and violence in the downtown area that police have reported. Like the robbery, these other crimes have seen victims targeted, seemingly without warning, by strangers. Collectively, the reports might give rise to concerns that our downtown core is becoming a more dangerous place and one more given to random acts of crime and violence than has ever been the experience in this community — let alone its downtown.

That is simply not the case and it would be most regrettable if that perception spread or took root.

These were despicable and troubling acts. It's further regrettable that suspects remain at large in at least two of them. But they're not evidence of our downtown or of Guelph generally becoming places of mean and unsafe streets.

A wider body of crime statistics painted Guelph as possibly the safest city to reside in Canada last year. That's a much more accurate and fair crime reporting story.

Guelph has a vibrant, fun and charming downtown. The broad-daylight mugging is an anomaly and an isolated act. That's little consolation for the victim. But it's the truth.

So is this: You can find trouble if you go looking for it in Guelph's downtown core. There are frequent late-night and early morning violent episodes in the area; most see some or all parties much influenced by intoxicants. But this is the case in any substantial Canadian community.

If you want to avoid trouble and enjoy downtown Guelph, you shouldn't have a problem. It's a safe and terrific place with substantial police resources devoted to keeping it that way and more on the way if the police service's 2010 business plan develops as expected and on schedule.

A new space plan

The following excerpt is from an editorial in *New York Times* on Tuesday.

President Barack Obama has called for scrapping NASA's once-ambitious program to return astronauts to the moon by 2020 as a first step toward reaching Mars. That effort, begun by former president George W. Bush, is behind schedule and its technology increasingly outdated.

Obama is instead calling on NASA to develop "game-changing" technologies to make long-distance space travel cheaper and faster, a prerequisite for reaching beyond the moon to near-by asteroids or Mars. To save money and free the agency for more ambitious journeys, the plan also calls for transferring NASA's more routine operations — carrying astronauts to the International Space Station — to private businesses. . . .

The new plan for long-distance space travel also needs clear goals and at least aspirational deadlines, that can help drive technology development and make it clear to the world that the United States is not retiring from space exploration but rather is pushing toward the hardest goal within plausible reach.

We believe the target should be Mars — the planet most like the Earth and of greatest scientific interest. . . .

At this point, the administration's plans to reorient NASA are only a proposal that requires congressional approval to proceed. Already many legislators from states that profit from the current NASA program are voicing opposition.

Less self-interested colleagues ought to embrace the notion of a truly ambitious space program with clear goals that stir all Americans' imaginations and challenge the country's scientists to think far beyond the moon.



letters to the editor

Don't tell lies about your symptoms

Dear editor;

As a resident of Wellington County I was shocked to read that residents of Erin are being encouraged to lie about symptoms when requesting an ambulance.

Ambulances and fires services are limited resources. The ambulance responding to your call does so on a priority basis.

Consider the following scenario.

An ambulance is dispatched to Erin for a patient with knee pain. While en route to this patient, a parent in Erin calls 911 and says their child is choking.

At this time the ambulance is responding on a "nonemergent" call and can be rerouted to the choking child, advanced procedures are performed on scene by a paramedic and the child survives.

The same patient, with knee pain, calls 911 and lies, stating that they are also having difficulty breathing. While en route to this patient, a parent in Erin calls 911 and says their child is choking.

Due to the fact that the ambulance is now responding on an "emergency," for difficulty breathing it cannot be rerouted to the choking child. So a second ambulance must be dispatched, further delaying the advanced procedures, and the child does not survive.

This priority system was developed because ambulances, unlike fire services perform both non-emergent and emergency calls.

Routinely, the ambulance responding to a car accident, heart attack, choking child or other life threatening emergency, has been removed from a non-emergency call.

Patients are moved by ambulance for flu-like symptoms, chronic back pain, doctors' appointments and numerous other minor ailments. Although legitimate, they are not life-threatening.

To advise the people of any

community to lie to a 911 dispatcher is irresponsible and will accomplish nothing but further increase wait times and possibly delay life-saving response by emergency services.

Greg Ballah, Fergus

Leash bylaw has gone to the dogs

Dear editor;

I try to be a good citizen and obey all the bylaws handed down by Guelph city council. I'm having more than a little trouble with the current dog leash bylaw, however.

The law states that while off-leash, my golden retriever, Dexter, must not approach "within 1.0 metre of any animal, bird or any person." During frequent walks off-leash in the Hanlon Creek area, I have diligently attempted to train Dexter to maintain the one-metre distance from other dogs and people. To my surprise, it seems to be impossible to get my dog to understand the concept of one metre.

Perhaps, like so many of us, Dexter is mired in the imperial system, and insists that the proper distance is not one metre but three feet. Dexter follows local politics, so perhaps he has picked up an anti-social contempt for city councillors and their bylaws, based on some notion that they have mismanaged both the city hall contract and the county arbitration. Or perhaps in associating with some bad poodle friends he has picked up the dangerous idea that the purpose of the off-leash area is to allow him to play with other dogs.

Certainly I have noticed many dogs in the park are setting a bad example by simply ignoring the one-metre bylaw. Some owners even reward canine lawbreakers with petting and treats! Dexter is a good dog and I don't want him to become like those free-spirited poodles. But it's impossible to teach him in this lawless environment. It's about time that council steps up leash law enforcement,

passes out some stiff fines, and enacts an additional bylaw to make minimum mastery of metric measurement mandatory for any dogs to be licensed.

Michael W. Mahoney
Guelph

Animals mistreated in China

Apparently the federal government is trying very hard to gain market favour in China for seal-hunt products. While this prospect may seem just peachy to many in this land, may I just add a little bit of lucidity to the story?

In China today many dogs are being mistreated and even killed in places such as open outdoor markets in plain sight. I watched a video of a little German shepherd held by wire noose and after she looked up with plaintive eyes, she was cut from groin to chin and skinned alive to her nose. Cats are as commonly and egregiously mistreated. This is just the tip of the story of Chinese brutality toward animals.

This is the connection being made for you and me in China; seal pup clubbing products marketed to a nation that supports unbelievable habits of animal cruelty.

Bob Millington, Guelph



letters welcome

We welcome your feedback. All letters will be edited for clarity, style, length and legal concerns. Letters should be no more than 250 words. Letters will be verified. Please include your name, address and daytime phone number. E-mail: editor@guelphmercury.com; write: Box 3604, 8-14 Macdonell St., Guelph, ON, N1H 6P7; fax: 519-767-1681.

Living frugally is a pleasant art

Many of us have never experienced the economic instability we have been facing recently, forcing us to re-examine our spending habits, often "making do" with what we have. The period of austerity and retrenchment following the Second World War was faced with surprising optimism, and rather than face "making do" with a negative outlook, quite the opposite happened. At that time it was a necessity, something everyone did. Women were encouraged to repair and remake their family's old clothes. Old curtains were cut up to make skirts and dresses. Unwanted sweaters were unraveled and knit into something else. Recycling, repurposing and reupholstering was a part of daily life then, and has come full circle to us.

Following the war, food was very hard to get a hold of, so people were encouraged to grow vegetables in order to feed their family. Cartoon characters called Potato Pete and Dr. Carrot appeared on leaflets, telling people to eat plenty of these foods. The slogan: Dig for



MELODY WREN
community
editorial board

Victory appeared on posters and banners to encourage people to grow their own food. Many in our community today are growing vegetables and herbs for the first time, taking delight in the taste and backyard availability of fresh produce on the table, discovering that simpler times can be fulfilling. Instead of relying on take out, there is a return to the kitchen, discovering baking, making dishes from scratch, and feeling proud of what emerges from a once-neglected room.

"Make do and mend" seems to be on the rise in our society. I remember my mother sitting at the kitchen table darned holes in our socks

with wool because buying new ones wasn't an option. Pieces for the home are once again improvised, handmade or repaired. People are taking up sewing and knitting, practising thriftiness for the first time in their lives and enjoying it. The personal investment in these handmade pieces has long-standing appeal.

We all have our own ideas on living frugally. Some spend nothing on holidays, preferring to focus on their homes, others switch the theme. I refuse to buy a sandwich while traveling, preferring to pack a lunch for the road or the plane, considering the money wasted on something I could make out of the fridge contents. If you want ideas on how to save money, talk to someone who has survived a war: I remember staying with a friend's family in Vancouver for several weeks while I was looking for an apartment when I was 19. They rinsed out milk bags, let them dry, cut them open, and used them for wrapping sandwiches. I took one to work daily and marvelled at the ingenuity.

To mark this shift in our economy, the Canadian gardening expert, Marjorie Harris has recently released a book on the subject called: Thrifty — Living The Frugal Life With Style. Do an internet search on living frugally, and prepare to be deluged by websites dedicated to the topic. Family lives are richer, because they are together again, and domestic life is more ... well, domestic. Children are learning valuable basic skills cooking, sewing, knitting, listening to others in the family and learning how to be more self-reliant. People are feeling creative, focusing on what is important to them and this creates a tumbledown effect — houses are becoming homes and families are nesting. The art of creating a comfortable home in times of economic uncertainty is back on the agenda.

Melody Wren is a member of the Guelph Mercury Community Editorial Board.