

Illegal dumping initiative starts in Bancroft

By Sarah Sobanski

New area signs are making people think twice about illegal dumping and they're set to spread across the province.

The Bancroft Area Stewardship Council (BASC) and the Ontario Association of Crime Stoppers unveiled their new signage project at Heart of the Park, April 21 just in time for Earth Day weekend. The signs were shot by Don Wilson and feature local models. They aim to educate people on the harms of illegal waste disposal and get them reporting environmental crimes as they would any other crime.

"When inconsiderate people decide to dump their garbage on public land the land becomes polluted," said Grade 9 student Rachel Ladouceur, who represented youth concerned about illegal dumping by modeling for the poster. "This pollution is dangerous for anyone using the bush for activities such as camping, hiking, and hunting. For example, some child steps on a piece of broken glass while out on a camping trip. Now, instead of enjoying their camping trip, the family will be spending their time in a hospital instead."

For \$500, community organizations and municipal services can buy an electronic, camera-ready file of the signage to print and distribute at their discretion. Proceeds from the signs will go back into BASC for further community projects. The signage displays the Crime Stoppers phone number.

"We wish to draw awareness to this crime and educate the public that there are opportunities out there for information for the public to come forward anonymously with us," said David Forster, president of the Canadian Crime Stoppers Association, explaining the association receives around 200,000 calls a year in Ontario, 42,000 of which are "actionable tips." "These acts we need to stop. There's a huge cost to every one of us."

He added, "Environmental crimes are the fourth most lucrative criminal activity in the world. [They] represent \$40 billion a year as a cost to society. They're exceeded only by the trade of narcotics, counterfeiting and human trafficking. It's a very significant kind of criminal activity and only one that we're just starting to draw awareness to now."

According to Forster, 385 Service Ontario outlets will be displaying the posters. Crime Stoppers will be launching similar initiatives across the province in the coming weeks. Local municipalities have also expressed interest in displaying the project.

"This isn't a project just for the Bancroft area, we're sending this all over the province. You're going to see the Bancroft logo, and the Crime Stoppers logo, in places like hopefully Fort Frances, Red Lake and wherever it happens to take place in the Province of Ontario," said BASC chair Steve Wilkins, who made Forster an honorary member of BASC. "There's [around] 440 municipalities in the province, times \$500 a piece if we get half of them, think of the money that's coming back to the stewardship council. That money will be used for projects in this area."

Wilkins said the council had discussed getting the program into schools as curriculum. He suggested some of the money generated from that possible project could be put back into the programs such as partnerships with Crime Stoppers.

"There's going to be more innovation, so we have to stay together and stay as partners on this," said Wilkins.

A press release for the event stated garbage from commercial waste including shingles, tires, chemicals, building materials, to household waste including fridges, couches, stoves, vehicles, household waste, and camping activity waste are all too commonly seen in area natural spaces.

To report illegal dumping you can call Crime Stoppers, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, or the town office.