



# GUELPH MERCURY

## Cops losing crack battle

'These deals happen all the time without anyone noticing'

BY DEIRDRE HEALEY  
MERCURY STAFF

**GUELPH**  
There is a vantage point downtown where city police watch dozens of crack deals going on in the middle of the afternoon.

Addicts use the nearby pay-phones to call their dealers and then wait in St. George's Square for a drug runner to appear with their fix.

All this is happening while people are passing them by on their way to get a coffee or to make a quick trip to the bank.

"These deals happen all the time without anyone noticing," said Guelph Police Sgt. Paul Martin, who heads up the force's tactical team. "It's something you have to look for."

The people walking through the downtown square also don't notice the undercover tactical team officers blending themselves into the scene of bus riders, shoppers and teenagers hanging out around the fountain.

The officers are waiting for their spotter, perched in a downtown building, to give them the signal that another crack cocaine deal has gone down.

A crack deal could look like two people briefly sitting next to one another and then going their separate ways, or a person making a quick trip upstairs to their downtown apartment and returning to the street, bumping into a friend and shaking hands.

The tactical team has been helping to push the rampant crack deals out of the city's downtown since the spring. Officers have trained their eyes to spot the smooth exchange of drugs and money.

"We spend about three hours each time we do surveillance of the downtown and we always end up with five or six arrests," Martin said.

Guelph drug investigator



Crack cocaine, scales and weapons were seized by Guelph Police during a bust at a crack house at 264 Grange St. in Guelph early this year. Police say they are seeing a rapid increase in crack activity in the city and are struggling to keep up. Drug unit officers focus limited resources on large dealers.

DAVE CARTER, GUELPH MERCURY

Ben Bair said the number of crack users in the city has ballooned over the past couple of years because the drug is cheap and easy to find.

"It's easier to buy crack on the street now than it is to buy weed," said Bair, who has been working with the drug unit for the past four years.

When Bair started on the unit, the focus was marijuana grow operations. But in recent years, the presence of marijuana has dropped and crack cocaine has filled the gap, he said.

Police estimate 2,000 people in Guelph are addicted to crack, which is derived from cocaine powder.

The powder is mixed with ammonia, or with baking soda and oil, and then cooked down to create the powerful rock-like drug.

### TAKING THE HIT

A five-part series on crack

Tuesday: The Deal

Wednesday: Addiction

Today: The Cops

Friday: The Community

Saturday: Prostitution

The drug is often smoked and a hit in Guelph costs as little as \$10.

Bair admits the police are fighting a losing battle as they focus their efforts on crack.

"The problem has grown exponentially and our resources haven't," he said.

"There is the belief out there that we have limited resources and that definitely plays a role in dealers coming to Guelph.

"In Toronto, setting up an investigation is an easy thing to do, but we just don't have the staff."

With only three drug investigators against a couple hundred crack dealers, Bair said, the team works to be as efficient as possible by hunting down the high rollers.

"That way we get the biggest bang for our buck," he said. "If we can knock off a large dealer, then we will have an impact on city crack houses."

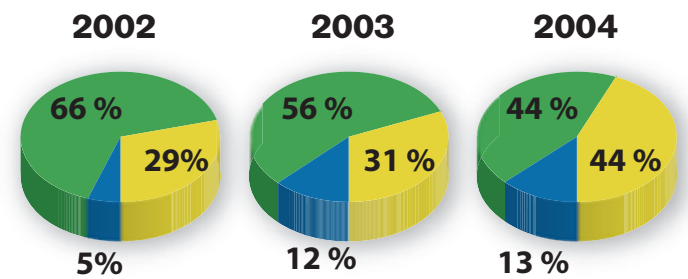
The three investigators arrive at work each morning and pick one target out of a pile of potential arrests.

SEE COURTS: PAGE A2

### ON THE RISE

A comparison of police charges connected to common illegal drugs found in Guelph

- Marijuana, mushrooms
- Heroin, crystal meth and other synthetic drugs
- Cocaine, including crack



Source: Guelph Police/ Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding  
GUELPH MERCURY GRAPHIC

### SPORTS



'Creeks win • B5

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## U of G scientist makes medical breakthrough

BY BRIAN WHITWHAM  
MERCURY STAFF

### GUELPH

A scientific breakthrough by a University of Guelph professor could advance the battle against diseases like cholera, diphtheria and cystic fibrosis.

Working with colleagues in Denmark, Rod Merrill, a molecular and cellular biology professor, has discovered how a deadly toxin attacks and destroys human cells.

Exotoxin A is produced by a nasty strain of bacteria that preys on anyone with a weakened immune system, including people with cancer, AIDS and cystic fibrosis.

The toxin is the tool the bacteria uses to prevent protein



NATHAN DENETTE, GUELPH MERCURY

Professor Rod Merrill, right, is part of a team that found out how a deadly toxin attacks and destroys human cells.

synthesis in the cell to kill it.

Merrill and his collaborators realized the toxin actually disguises itself as part of the ribo-

some, the structure that acts as the cell's protein factory, which the toxin shuts down.

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## Obesity increases need for joint replacements

BY THANA DHARMARAJAH  
MERCURY STAFF

### GUELPH

Virginia Ozaki didn't think anything of her 180-pound weight until a constant, throbbing pain attacked her knees.

"I lived eight hours a day in constant pain," said the 57-year-old former machine operator who stands five feet, four inches tall.

"When the weather got cold I paid the price."

A new report from the Canadian Institute for Health Information revealed obese people were three times as likely to have joint replacement surgery compared to those with a healthy body weight.

People who are overweight, like Ozaki, were twice as likely to have similar surgery.

Ozaki has had both her

knees replaced in the past three years.

A study of 17,000 patients in 2003-04 showed that 46 per cent were obese and 35 per cent were overweight.

"It's a cause for concern," said Nicole De Guia, a consultant with the health institute. "It's sort of a cycle leading to the demand for these surgeries."

Guelph General Hospital received \$400,000 earlier this summer to increase hip and knee replacements, cataract and cancer surgeries by 10 per cent between April and September.

The funding should bump hip and knee replacement surgeries at the hospital up to 356 instead of the 290 surgeries originally expected.

SEE SURGERIES: PAGE A2

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