

## Regional News *Prairie Region*

### Throw Overs: A Community Solution to a Community Problem

*By Chris McLauchlan, Search Coordinator/Dog Handler, Stony Mountain Institution*

**S**tony Mountain Institution (SMI) is a medium-security penitentiary located approximately 15 kilometres north of Winnipeg, Manitoba. The prison is the second oldest federal penitentiary in Canada and, over time, the small community of Stony Mountain has sprung up around the facility. In fact, part of the community is made up of homes that at one time were correctional officer housing. While the prison and the community have a close relationship with one another, their proximity has created a problem: drug throw-overs. These occur when individuals attempt to throw packages of contraband drugs over the fence on to the prison property. While this problem exists at other institutions as well, it is particularly challenging at Stony Mountain; trespassers literally run through people's yards to toss drugs over the fences.

Historically, the prison has attempted to deal with the problem internally. Higher fences were erected, exercise times modified, extra patrols sent out. There were some successful cooperative efforts with local law enforcement, as well. However, the most successful method of dealing with the situation has come from the community of Stony Mountain itself. Concerned members of the community phoned the institution to alert them to suspicious activity occurring outside the fences. This allowed officers to react and often intercept packages. While this method was successful, it was ad hoc and confined to only a couple of citizens.

Earlier this year, SMI started to develop a plan to involve the community to a greater extent. Expanding on an idea developed by Laval Police and Leclerc Institution, the plan was to educate the citizens of Stony Mountain about the situation and empower them to make change. A leaflet was distributed to every home in the community, describing the problem of drug throw-overs, a new Tip Line phone number was provided, and citizens were invited to an information session.

The Tip Line leads directly to the main command and control post (MCCP) so that suspicious activity can be reported. The officer in the MCCP immediately knows the purpose of the call and responds using cameras and radio. As well, the MCCP operator is provided



**Houses are in close proximity to SMI fences, making throw-overs a problem.**

with an information form to help gather and record the information. Callers are given an opportunity to leave a contact number, if they wish, for follow-up by members of the institution's security intelligence office. The institution even installed lettered signs along the exterior perimeter fence so that citizens can better describe where activity is taking place.



**Correctional Officer II Chris McLauchlan and drug dog Samson**

On September 13, 2004, Stony Mountain Institution hosted the information session at the local community centre to educate the public and discuss the issue of drug throw-overs. Volunteers from various SMI departments were on hand to contribute to the event. The small but enthusiastic crowd of residents saw displays on substance abuse programming, harm reduction initiatives, and preventive security. They witnessed demonstrations of the ion spectrometer and the drug detection dog team. After being welcomed by SMI's acting warden, they heard from the institutional search coordinator/dog handler, the security intelligence officer, and the head of the local Royal Canadian Mounted Police detachment. Finally, they participated in an open discussion and question and answer session.

The event was extremely successful. Participants were very enthusiastic about being included in the solution and local television news carried the story. VIPs included the local reeve as well as the chairpersons for the citizen's advisory committee and the Citizen's On Patrol Program (COPP – similar to Neighbourhood Watch). The COPP reported that they signed up five new members who would receive training by the RCMP in order to observe and report criminal activity in the community. Calls to the Tip Line were coming in and being acted upon.

While suspicious activity calls were on the increase, officers were intercepting less contraband. The increase in community involvement and was making the trespassers uncomfortable because officers were appearing on the scene much quicker. Overall, the initiative was a great example of including the community in solutions to correctional challenges that directly concern them. ■