

Sunalta's hired gun making last stand



ROBERT REMINGTON

The Texas cavalry arrived Friday night, did its recon mission on the weekend, and today goes into battle, guns a-blazin', ready to convince an appeal tribunal that putting ex-cons in Sunalta is a bad idea.

The Texan, well-known criminologist Kim Rossmo, has been hired by the Sunalta-Scarboro Coalition for a Safer Community to help them appeal a decision to relocate a halfway house for ex-cons in their neighbourhood.

The group has spent \$35,000 fighting the decision, and today brings Rossmo to City Hall for a last stand against the 32-bed halfway house at 1920 and 1924 11th Ave. SW, a street of older, three-floor walkup apartments.

I'm thinking Rossmo will end up like Custer. He'll put up a brave fight for the community but, against overwhelming odds, he'll be defeated. Give the Sunalta group and its hired gun credit, however, for trying.

The risk is not when they are in the halfway house. The risk comes later

Up until now, the debate around the issue has been that the operators of the halfway house, the John Howard Society, run a pretty tight ship. In 20 years of running Bedford House,

KIM ROSSMO, CRIMINOLOGIST

located a block north of the Saddledome at 615 13th Ave. S.E. in Victoria Park, they've never had a resident ex-con commit a crime within the community.

With a record like that, it's hard to argue that there will be any big threat to Sunalta.

Rossmo, though, makes some interesting arguments. Criminals, he says, commit offences in areas they are familiar with, a process he refers to as making a "mental map" of an area.

"The risk is not when they are in the halfway house," he said in an interview. "The risk comes later. When people live in an area for six months, the area now becomes part of their mental map. They have a future list of targets if they recidivate," or re-offend.

Whether the city's subdivision and development appeal board buys the argument is doubtful. Although there's little doubt that Canadians are fed up with high-profile repeat offenders, recidivism rates are actually extremely low, according to National Parole Board statistics.

Then there's the issue of how the board might react to a celebrity criminal profiler like Rossmo. I mean, what Texan has the right to come here and tell us how to run our nice little town, anyway?

Actually, Rossmo was born in Saskatoon.

In Vancouver, he became the first Canadian police officer to earn a doctorate in criminology, which resulted in a meteoric promotion from constable to detective inspector, causing several noses to be out of joint on the Vancouver force. As a graduate student at Simon Fraser University, Rossmo developed a modelling program known as geographic profiling and was put in charge of a new section with that title on the Vancouver police force.

He further ruffled feathers in the department for suggesting that a serial killer was responsible for the disappearance of sex trade workers from Vancouver's downtown eastside, was demoted and later lost a wrongful dismissal suit.

All of which is irrelevant to the Sunalta halfway house, says Rossmo.

"Let's just say I've fought city hall before."

His serial killer theory is now being played out in the Robert Pickton trial. Rossmo says he's averaging two calls a day to comment on the trial.

"Quite frankly, I'm getting a bit tired of it," he said.

Rossmo says halfway houses are valuable, but Sunalta is the wrong location. With the neighbourhood's higher-than-average city crime rate, he says it makes better sense for paroled criminals to be in an area where there is less temptation.

"If it's a bad fit for the community, then it's probably a bad fit for the person on parole. The issue is the best place to put it that doesn't have risks for everybody involved."

Whether the subdivision and development appeal board will be impressed by any of this is doubtful. The risk of a murderer re-offending less than one per cent. For violent criminals as a whole, it's about three per cent.

But as the concerned residents of Sunalta might argue, all it takes is one.

WALK IN THE SNOW



A pedestrian makes his way across a bridge along the Bow River pathway near the Calgary Zoo on Sunday. Inclement weather kept many indoors except those determined to brave the elements. Ted Jacob, Calgary Herald

Native preschool to reopen

Court decision returns control to new board

CALGARY HERALD

A preschool that offers a head start program on aboriginal culture for three to five year olds will re-open today after a Court of Queen's Bench justice restored control to a recently elected board of directors.

Omeme'sis Learning Centre has been at the heart of a contentious fight for power between a board elected in November and members of the previous board who claim the

election was illegal.

Members of the old board won a court decision in January giving them interim control over the preschool and the Aboriginal Resource Centre, but that judgment was stayed Friday by Justice Karen Horner, returning power to the new board.

"We've been in touch with parents to let them know classes will be running," said Connie Boisvert, executive director of Omeme'sis.

"All the staff that were let go have been working through the weekend to ensure the facility is open Monday afternoon."

Boisvert and other staff members say they were fired two weeks ago by the old board when it gained interim power and the locks were changed.

The preschool will open this morning for one class — about 20 children — while the heating system is repaired and at 12:30 p.m. all 50 kids will be able to attend said Boisvert.

Parents of children who attend the preschool filled the courtroom Friday.

Horner said she granted control to the board elected in November in order to establish a "period of calm" until the legal issues are sorted out.

Both sides will be back in court in March. The Public Health Agency of Canada, the organization's primary backer, has frozen funding while the courts decide which board will run operations.

Boisvert said the new board plans to meet with government officials today to discuss funding.

Immersion parents 'optimistic'

SARAH MCGINNIS
CALGARY HERALD

A proposed overhaul of French immersion in south Calgary has been changed, but a parents group says more work is required before it will support the Calgary Board of Education's plan.

Members of South Calgary Immersion Families Association will meet this week to evaluate a new French immersion proposal presented to parents last Tuesday.

"I am cautiously optimistic we're starting to head in the right direction," said Michelle Mather, spokeswoman for the newly formed group.

The CBE altered its plan for changes to the French immersion program in south Calgary to address concerns raised during a series of earlier meetings with parents.

Under the new plan, only the French immersion program at Kingsland Elementary would be recommended for possible closure, said Phil Carlton, the CBE's director of student accommodation and operational planning.

The French language curriculum would continue at Ecole Chinook Park School and Sundance Elementary for the coming year. But new programs planned for Braeside Elementary, Douglasdale School and Mountain Park School this September are now on hold.

Mather's two kids attend Sundance Elementary. She's relieved to hear they won't have to change schools next year. "I'll send out an applaud to Phil Carlton and his group for putting on the brakes somewhat and giving us some room to sit down and come back to the table," Mather said.

"It is not a stellar plan, though. There are some issues I can see regarding the Chinook Park, Kingsland Elementary and William Reid corridor."

As part of long-range student accommodation planning, CBE officials will continue searching for a French immersion location for communities west of Macleod Trail and south of Fish Creek.

A review of French immersion is also taking place in Calgary's north. Marilyn Wilkinson's three children attend Ecole Chinook Park School. She's pleased with the changes that salvaged her local French immersion program.

"I am a parent who believes they've actually listened," Wilkinson said. "I've attended all the forums, and I genuinely believe our voices were heard, our concerns were heard, and I think the proposal reflects that. It put my faith back into the system."

SMCGINNIS@THEHERALD.CANWEST.COM

Teen in head-on crash near Sylvan Lake dies

HIGHWAY 11 • A 16-year-old Alberta boy involved in a head-on crash Friday near Sylvan Lake has died.

The teen was a passenger in an eastbound Toyota Rav4 that was struck head-on by a westbound Dodge truck along Hwy. 11 near Range Road 22 around 6:30 p.m. Friday, Sylvan Lake RCMP said.

Ambulances took the teen and two others from the Rav and two people from the Dodge to hospital to be treated for various injuries.

The teen did not survive. He died Saturday, police said.

RCMP are still investigating the cause of the crash, but weather did not appear to be a factor, police said.

At the request of the teen's family, no further information about the victim was being released.

Regulation to focus on downtown alleys

PARKING • A bylaw targeting drivers who repeatedly park too long in downtown alleys and loading zones could be in place by March.

The city has struggled with ways to deal with vehicles owned by paper shredding companies that park at meters for most of the day. One company, Shred-It, has received more than 250 tickets since June 2005.

In December, council passed a bylaw to deal with the repeat parking offenders.

The final phase of the bylaw, which will go to committee on Wednesday, addresses vehicles that park in back alleys and overstay allotted time in loading zones. Newspaper vendors and sidewalk cafes, however, would be exempt from the rules.

If passed by council later this month, the bylaw would take effect on March 1.

Drivers charged for either offence will be subject to a \$200 fine, which would be reduced to \$160 if paid within 21 days.

City unveils new land-use bylaw

DEVELOPMENT • The city has released its proposed land-use bylaw after four years of work by municipal officials and community groups.

The bylaw, which will replace rules nearly 30 years old, will update requirements for development and redevelopment of every property in Calgary outside of the downtown core and the Beltline.

It will go before the Calgary planning commission on Feb. 23 for review, and then to a public hearing of council on March 19.

City officials said the proposed bylaw sets out expectations for land uses, building form and site design for new developments. It also includes a set of land-use maps for every property in Calgary.

It's expected the bylaw will streamline the development process by setting more detailed rules and better describing the requirements in each area.

The proposed bylaw is available on the city's website at www.calgary.ca/landusebylaw.

It can be purchased on the city's online store or at the planning document centre on the third floor of the Municipal Building, 700 Macleod Tr. S.E.

— Calgary Herald

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INFORMATION SESSION

THE CITY OF CALGARY WATER RESOURCES CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES IN FISH CREEK PARK

Attend a public information session to learn about City of Calgary construction activities in Fish Creek Park for 2007. City staff will be on-hand to answer questions.

Date: Tuesday, Feb. 13, 2007
Time: 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Location: Fish Creek Park Visitor's Centre
15979 Bow Bottom Trail S.E.

For more information visit www.calgary.ca/waterservices or call 3-1-1.

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