

GREATER TORONTO

Peel police board defends gala tickets

Critics say cash from criminals could be used for community safety

SAN GREWAL  
URBAN AFFAIRS REPORTER

The Peel police services board's executive director is defending the board's practice of buying tickets for the private galas of mayors Susan Fennell and Hazel McCallion, despite public criticism.

The board, which includes Fennell and Peel Region chair Emil Kolb, has spent up to \$8,000 a year from its Special Fund to buy tables at Fennell's annual gala and \$4,000 at McCallion's, plus \$1,000 to \$2,000 a

year on the mayors' golf tournaments. The cash comes from proceeds of stolen or seized property.

That's "outrageous," said Mississauga Councillor Sue McFadden. "I sit on regional council and I can tell you things like Mississauga Safe City and Brampton Safe City have to beg for funding," she said. "Four or six thousand dollars would start a very good safety program in a school. These soirees have nothing to do with the public's best interest; they're drinking parties."

The Police Services Act states broadly that a police board may use crime-proceeds funds "for any purpose that it considers in the public interest." However, some GTA boards have written policies more

specific and restrictive than Peel's.

Asked if Peel's policy allows buying gala tickets, executive director Fred Biro said: "Of course it does, otherwise it wouldn't happen." A clause says he may spend up to \$3,000 on event tickets at a time.

The policy also states that, "as required, community groups be advised that a condition of receiving funds is the filing of the previous year's annual audited statement." That has not been fulfilled by Fennell's arts gala, which has come under fire for secrecy and has only recently released two years' worth of partial financial statements.

Biro explained in an email that the board can exercise discretion on requiring an audited report, "depend

ent upon a number of factors, including the nature of the disbursement, the event and its purpose."

Fennell did not respond to a request for comment.

The policy further says priority should go to activities that "demonstrate a direct link to the Board's goals and work and the reduction of crime within the community." Also, "support for community events (should) be limited to those events where the proceeds go to support a Board or policing priority."

According to Mississauga's treasurer, 80 per cent of revenue from McCallion's gala is spent on the event itself, and only one-third of the rest goes directly to arts groups.

The Toronto board's guidelines

are clearer about how the money is to be used: for "supporting community-oriented policing," awards, or police fitness/athletics funding. Recipients must file reports within 60 days accounting for the cost-effectiveness of the program.

Executive director Joanne Campbell said the Toronto board has never paid for something like arts gala tickets. "They have funded the chief's fundraiser for victims' services, and I think Crime Stoppers." Her counterpart in Halton Region, Dorothy McDonald, said her board has never received such a request.

Biro said he "expects the other boards to respect the Peel board's wisdom" on the matter. "They have their needs and we have our needs."

Jail term would cost officer's job, judge told

Toronto detective broke prisoner's arm

PETER SMALL  
COURTS BUREAU

An "excellent" Toronto police detective convicted of breaking a prisoner's arm should be spared jail time because it will lead to his firing, a judge has been told.

"A jail sentence for Officer (Christopher) Higgins will end his career," defence lawyer Gary Clewley said Tuesday, calling for a suspended sentence.

But Crown prosecutor John McInnis urged provincial court Justice Lucia Favret to send a message to police that assaulting prisoners won't be tolerated.

The prosecutor asked for a jail sentence of three to six months.

"No police officer is a law unto himself," McInnis said,



Christopher Higgins

as 30 supporters of the tall, neatly dressed detective sat in court, many of them police.

In June, Favret found the veteran officer guilty of assault causing bodily harm to drug suspect, Gary Shuparski, 50.

It was the second trial in this case for the former drug squad officer who has remained on duty since he was charged in 2004.

Higgins was first acquitted in 2005, but the Crown appealed and a Superior Court judge ordered a new trial.

In the first trial, the 120-pound prisoner testified that the hulking 275-pound officer beat him and kicked him "like a football" after he made a snide remark in a 51 Division interview room on April 1, 2004.

Shuparski has since died of a drug overdose.

At the sentencing hearing Tuesday, Clewley filed 78 letters of support for his client.

Toronto police Insp. Neil Corrigan testified that Higgins, 40, is a "benchmark of excellence" at the east Toronto police division where he works.

The judge invited Higgins for comment. The officer rose to say the lengthy proceedings have taken their toll. They have led to his being barred from coaching his kids and from job promotions. He doesn't want to attend social functions "because it's all people want to talk about," he said.

Favret will sentence Higgins April 5.

Clewley said in an interview that it's the practice of the Toronto Police Service to fire officers convicted of criminal offences if they are sentenced to jail.

But Toronto police spokesperson Meaghan Gray said dismissal is not automatic in such cases. It depends on several factors, including whether the officer can fulfill his or her oath of office, she said.

Higgins faces two police disciplinary charges arising from the assault, unnecessary use of force against a prisoner and discreditable conduct, Gray said.

Higgins is to appear on those charges April 26.



BORIS SPREMO/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

Developer Paul Oberman was behind the restoration of the old Summerhill train station, now an LCBO outlet.

Oberman saw value of heritage

Few Torontonians have heard of Paul Oberman, but most know his work whether they realize it or not.

He was the driving force behind the brilliant renovation of the old North Toronto train station on Yonge St., better known as the Summerhill liquor store, as well as a number of heritage renovation projects around the city.

The Toronto real estate developer was one of a tiny handful of builders who understood the value of architectural history and who made it part of his work.

His death Monday night in a plane crash over Maine will be a huge loss in a city that places little value on its past. Where most of his fellow developers happily pay lip service to preservation, Oberman didn't just talk the talk — he also walked the walk.

Last year, for example, he led a last-minute charge to save the vintage World War II hangars at what's now Downsview Park. He went so far as to contact generals in the Department of National Defence to persuade them that these old structures could find new life in the 21st century.

The fact he failed was more a reflection of the fossilized thinking and lack of enlightenment at DND than Oberman's willingness to fight for heritage.

"Where do you find land developers like Paul?" wonders Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, in whose



CHRISTOPHER HUME

downtown ward Oberman lived and worked. "He was a visionary. He put forward a new model of heritage preservation that allowed developers and property owners to be profitable while doing the right thing. Every brick and stone in his buildings would be restored."

By the standards of the development industry, Oberman's commitment to architecture was remarkable, even unique. Compared with most developers, who feel put-upon when asked to save a facade or two, Oberman went out of his way to restore, rehabilitate and reuse buildings of architectural and civic significance.

Most important of all, his ability to make heritage pay for itself put the lie to an industry that rarely looks beyond the borders of its own holdings.

The recent destruction of the old Empress Hotel building at Yonge and Gould Sts. might have been a more typical fate for a Toronto heritage site. Police say it was burnt to the ground by an arsonist. But it had been in poor shape for years.

Oberman grasped that in addition to everything else, heritage makes good business sense. But that success requires time, money, imagination and passion for more than the bottom line.

"It wasn't philanthropy," argues Rollo Myers, manager of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario. "It was business. Paul was able to make a product that people were keen to be associated with. It's his work that we point to in order to show how preservation should be done."

"He was never greedy for density but always managed to strike the right balance between modest intensification and fitting in. He also had consummate taste. The projects I've seen in Ottawa and Toronto set a very high standard."

Still, Oberman's argument that tax incentives and heritage grants return more to public coffers through increased rents and property values went largely unheeded in a city with no long-term vision of itself.

"How will we create a vibrant urban environment consisting of exciting and remarkable built forms if we turn our backs on the great achievements — and even the mere survival — of our past?" Oberman asked. "If we don't value our heritage, how will we create anything of value in the future? A desirable future, I submit, is tied to our past."

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Developer remembered as a visionary

OBERMAN from GT1

Family friends said the son, who goes to university in Halifax, had been in Toronto for the funeral of a friend who died recently in a ski accident.

Colleagues remembered Oberman as the kind of person you call when a property needs some TLC.

"Everything he did, he just did with such enthusiasm and so well," said Catherine Nasmith, an architect and publisher of a heritage newsletter.

Nasmith remembers Oberman as wise, compassionate and meticulous in the projects he worked on. She said his death is a devastating loss to the heritage community and the city.

"He was rare citizen," she said.

Similar sentiments rolled in on a Facebook memorial page on Tuesday, where Oberman was remembered as a visionary committed to creating a better city.

Oberman went to great lengths to try and save Downsview Airport's hangars from demolition, making it an issue that, friends say, reached the country's highest offices.

"In the end we did not succeed. But I never saw anyone work so hard," said Lloyd Alter of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, who worked with Oberman to save the hangars.

Oberman also restored the iconic Gooderham Building, the Shops at Scrivener Square and was in the process of redeveloping and restoring Market St. near the St. Lawrence Market.

Alter said Oberman's dedication is evident in those projects.

"They're perfect. They're gems. And that's Paul.

"He never skimmed. He never cut corners. He did it right."

In an obituary written by a family friend, Oberman is remembered as an adventurer who cycled, hiked and flew airplanes.

Oberman leaves his wife, Eve Lewis, and six children.



Woodcliffe Properties president Paul Oberman died Monday.

Organized crime group has international reach

MAFIA from GT1

Giuseppe Pignatone, the prosecutor of Reggio Calabria, the regional capital, said the operation confirms the 'Ndrangheta's reach goes well beyond Italy. It also sheds light on the group's structure and how it runs in countries outside Italy.

"The foreign groups always maintain contact with the mother house, which is the Reggio Calabria area,

where they periodically come to take their orders, directives, long-term strategies, as well as give an account of what's going on," Pignatone said in comments to Radio 24.

It was not clear how many suspects had been apprehended.

In the past decade, the 'Ndrangheta has emerged as a powerful and aggressive organization, becoming one of the world's biggest cocaine traffickers. Today, it is seen as more

powerful than the Sicilian Mafia, which suffered from a massive crackdown and internal wars in the 1980s.

In a shocking act that put the 'Ndrangheta in the international spotlight in 2007, six Italian men were gunned down as they left a birthday party at an Italian restaurant in Duisburg, Germany. The massacre was part of a long-running feud between two clans of the

crime group.

The government has launched a crackdown on the 'Ndrangheta that has resulted in hundreds of arrests, millions of euros in seized assets and a handful of turncoats.

Tuesday's raids followed up on a massive police operation in July that brought more than 300 people behind bars, dealing a serious blow to the group.

With files from Associated Press