



ERIC SILK

Eric Silk really loves his new job

By JIM ROBINSON
City Editor

Eric Silk may have retired from the Ontario Provincial Police as its commissioner but he is hardly leading a quiet relaxed life in a cozy corner of Mississauga.

He is the chairman of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board which has been created to help any and all people who have suffered some form of physical grief as the result of a crime.

GO commuter

His day begins early. He has to drive his Datsun down from his Streetsville-area home to the GO Train station in Clarkson so he can be in his Toronto office to wade into the reports and hearings. He works late. When this interview was held, Thursday, Mr. Silk didn't get home until 9 p.m.

"I was going to retire and just take it easy and live near the rest of the family here in Streetsville.

"This job, well, I wasn't sure at the very first if I should go after it but I did and now I'm very glad I did.

"I do this job because I honestly love it. It's the kind of work where something very positive is being accomplished.

"During my years on the OPP I was known as an

organizer. On this job I'm going to do the same thing," he said.

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board hears more than 400 cases each year from people applying for compensation for injuries suffered.

An example is Application Number 200-12. An 18-year-old Hamilton girl was walking down the street when she was hit in the eye with a pellet believed to have been fired from a pellet gun.

As a result of the injury, she has virtually no sight in the eye and the condition is considered to be permanent.

After the review of the application, the board awarded her \$3,000 for pain and suffering.

Mississauga victim

In Application Number 200-153, a 35-year-old unemployed truck driver was leaving a restaurant in Mississauga when he was assaulted by three men. The truck driver received a fractured nose and an injured knee. The assailants are still unknown. The victim was awarded \$500.

Application Number 200-285 involved a 24-year-old man who was struck from behind as he left a Mississauga shopping mall and walked to his car. The

victim was able to fight off his attackers who fled in a car. The attackers were never found but the victim had a very bad scalp wound. He was awarded \$150 for pain and suffering.

The board grew from the Law Enforcement Compensation Act, which was passed June 15, 1967. It was the first time the Ontario government decided to compensate victims of crime but it was very restrictive, applying only to persons killed or injured assisting a peace officer.

This was broadened in 1969 with an amendment that authorized payment not only to those helping a peace officer but anyone who became the victim of a crime. The act was repealed Sept. 1, 1971 with the Royal Assent given to the new Compensation for Victims of Crime Act, 1971. They set up the board that Mr. Silk now heads.

The board exists, he said, because the state should ensure the safety of its citizens and "the sense of responsibility which a humane society feels for victims of crime."

The board has the power to award lump sums, in the case of injury or death to one victim, to the tune of \$15,000 and, in the case of periodic payments, up to \$500 per month. The total paid to all applicants in any

one occurrence can go up as high as \$100,000.

"While we want to aid victims of crime, I wouldn't want anyone to think we just dole out the money.

Important aspect

"Our main jurisdiction is in the area of pain and suffering. That's the most important aspect for us."

It's all run rather informally but the cases have to be backed up with documentary evidence and testimony the same as in a court.

"While we may be informal, it makes for a relaxed and simple method of arriving at the facts and making a decision accurately.

"We have the power to set the amount in regards to the seriousness we feel is involved in each application.

"We may cut the usual amount in half if we find the victim is partly responsible for what happened to him such as a case where a man insulted a woman and another unknown person assaulted him.

"In most cases, I think the results have been very fair. As far as I know, of all the cases heard to date, only one person wasn't satisfied so that's a pretty good indication of what the board is doing," Mr. Silk said.

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board is a

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Eric Silk calls new responsibility bringing 'justice to the people'

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governmental infant. It has only been in operation for three years so it needs someone to work it into adolescence and adulthood.

"Under my predecessor, Arthur Wishart, they heard four cases per day on two days per week. They could dispose of about 400 to 500 cases per year.

"I'm surprised that so few people have heard about the board so I've had a brochure prepared that will go out to the citizens of Ontario to inform them of the board and how it is set up to help them.

"I expect the case load to double as the board gets better known and this is a healthy step.

"I'd also like to take the board out of its main seat in Toronto and sit in cities like Windsor, London, Ottawa, and Thunder Bay so we can hear each application in its own area which will help us if we have to take a look at the scene of the crime.

JUSTICE TO THE PEOPLE

"You could call it a form of bringing justice to the people. It will also enable us to do more preparation in advance," he said.

So it's still a 12-hour day for Eric Silk. He doesn't say it but working for the people of Ontario has been a full-time job ever since he came in "under Mitch Hepburn and George Drew was always very kind to me.

"I remember those days with fondness but I must say that what I'm doing today is something that really appeals to me . . . it's the right kind of work."

Mr. Silk bought his current home in the Streetsville area of Mississauga in November.

Although he lived most of his life in Toronto, his son, Dr. R.A. Silk, is a very successful veterinarian in Streetsville and the Silks' daughter and her husband are also living there now.

"My wife and my daughter are very good friends. We were living in Don Mills and the two of them would be commuting back and forth between the two places.

"Well, my son's here too and I kind of like this part of the country so when I retired we thought we'd move here and be with the rest of the family," Mr. Silk said.

The house isn't pretentious but it is a warm brick abode on a nice quiet street with kids riding bicycles being chased by their dogs.

Inside the house has a kind of refined taste one would expect. The basement is the piece de resistance. It's all rich woods, fine carpets, deep comfortable chairs, something like the lounging area of a great golf and country club.

"We wanted to build something that's comfortable. We had to do a lot of work on it but it's been worth the effort I think," he said.

WORKSHOP

He explained how he put in that panelling and built this table. He's asked if he does a bit of handiwork and then with a smile he leads you down the hall to the workshop and, glory be, enough wood and tools to make any carpenter drool.

The next room is opened to reveal a first class ham

radio set-up. The equipment is the best and it has a lived at appearance that tells you Eric Silk really gets a kick out of this hobby.

Back in the main room he brings down a few of the many tankards he has collected.

One is from the Michigan-Ontario Identification Officers Association and he said it was presented to him at the time by a good OPP officer. Today that officer is Doug Burrows, the chief of the Peel Regional Police.

"Doug is a good man. He's smart, efficient, and he knows how to get the best out of his men. He's gone far and he's deserved it," Mr. Silk said.

He's a well known person in almost all circles in the province and the talk bounces from one experience to another but inexorably leads back to the board.

"We want more people to understand that the government feels they should help them recover from a nasty incident.

"This board is a good thing . . . It's right and I guess that's the reason I like it."