

A night on the campus with university security

By GARRY MARR

Thursday, November 3 — pub night. Excalibur spent the night touring the campus with plainclothes York Security officers Robert Hughes and Janet Schefter. The full-time officers are two of the 26 men and women who patrol Keele Campus and try to safeguard it against vandalism and violence. York's 550 acres and 43 buildings are private property and the responsibility of Security.

At approximately 10:30 p.m. we're confronted with the first incident of the night. Five males are spotted coming out of a bush adjacent to the Keele St. parking lots. Hughes immediately pulls the car to a stop in front of them. Questions follow. One male produces his driver's license. After a brief check over the radio, during which another security team arrives as back-up, the five are on their way.

"If it wasn't Thursday night I might have pursued that more," says Hughes. The usual procedure is to ask for identification. Any other night the activities of five males would have been viewed as more suspicious and all might have been asked to produce identification.

Neither of the two security guards

is willing to conjecture on what the five males were doing in the bush.

"I know it seems like a bit much at times," says Hughes, "but we've had people assaulted."

"We're not here to hassle people," he adds, "but if they were up to something, now they'll think twice about it."

The two have had their share of close calls on duty. Earlier this month, two men with a club and a knife confronted Schefter after she had tried to stop their argument from becoming violent. She had to fend for herself until assistance arrived. Security officers are without weapons.

"We don't need handguns here," says Hughes, "but there are times I would feel more confident with a nightstick." However, both officers agree that weapons are not a big priority.

One of Security's biggest problems is restraining an individual who resists arrest. If an individual resists by kicking and punching, an officer sometimes has to sit on the culprit until Metro Police arrive. This type of restraint could potentially be viewed by the public as brutality.

However, there is a negative image that is associated with handcuffs —

especially on a university campus.

Director of Security Michael O'Neil says handcuffs are not necessary. But there are other instances where security is almost powerless and Special Constable status might allow them to do their jobs better. For example, it is difficult now for security to search a suspect, even if the individual is known to have committed a crime.

"There are circumstances where it would be nice if we had the Special Constable power," says O'Neil. The University could restrict the powers of a Special Constable by simply not applying for status that includes handcuffs or a nightstick.

The need for greater power stems from an increasing crime rate in the surrounding area. But O'Neil says the solution to vandalism on campus is not only increased security presence, but also more community support.

"We didn't have the support we should have had, but it is now starting to come together," says O'Neil. Last week, two students made a citizen's arrest after spotting a vandal destroying a trophy display case.

The job also has its lighter moments. A patrol through a parking lot reveals one couple and a set of

steamy windows. On a Sunday morning more than one couple can be found hungover and naked in the back of their car.

"There are actually a couple of regulars who have no shame at all," says Schefter.

At midnight, a call is placed for security at McLaughlin residence. A girl is lying on the ground after having a seizure. Hughes and Schefter have both had first aid training and are able to handle many situations.

We continue through McLaughlin College and check the upstairs halls. There is no one around except a cleaning lady. One of the run-off effects of increased violence and vandalism on campus is a maintenance crew that is scared to do its job at night. In fact, complaints have been lodged by its union.

Also on the second floor, behind a piano room, we find the personal belongings of someone who has apparently set up house for the night. And this is not an irregular occurrence. There are people who will spend the night on campus because they don't have a place to sleep. But security has to ask them to leave before they move in.

Hughes figures that 75 per cent of

their job is routine, and that 25 per cent is legalities.

"We make a good living," he says, "and we focus a lot into our work."

This year alone Schefter and Hughes figure to put in 300-400 hours of overtime each. Add that to a regular 44-hour week and both spend a lot of time on the job. It is for this reason that many security officers are friends beyond the job.

As the first female on security, things were not always friendly for Janet. She had to take "a lot of crap."

"They said I'd last a couple of weeks," says Schefter. Guys will challenge her more, she says. "I just stand on my own ground." Since she began four years ago the force has grown to include six women.

The job has also changed a little since she began.

"When I started here, violence was almost unheard of," she says. "It was easy." A notebook for keeping track of incidents used to last a long time; now it's half full after a month.

The night ends for me at about 2 a.m. But for Schefter and Hughes, their shifts continue until the morning, and then they're back on the job later in the afternoon.

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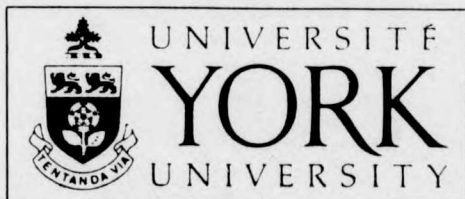
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