

Facilities

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IH licensing officers do not have the ability to issue tickets to facilities in non-compliance, but there are other methods of enforcement, said Lively.

"If we're not getting the remediation that we expect and we start to lose confidence that they are able to comply, then we have the ability to suspend or cancel a licence or put terms and constraints on a licence," she said.

A residential-care facility is less likely to be shut down than other types of facilities, however, since a closure would disrupt the people who live there, she added.

"We certainly wouldn't be closing a facility that would leave 100 some-odd residents without a home."

Instead, IH would appoint an administrator who would step in and take over operation of the facility.

"It would be a risk-based decision, and we would need to have exhausted every opportunity," she said. "We would need to lose confidence in their ability to proactively identify risk and to make steps to mitigate that risk. If we feel that people are at risk and we have no other alternative, then that's when we would invoke an administrator."

Increased penalties need to be put in place to ensure facilities make changes and comply with regulations, said local advocate Judy Galley.

"When you start seeing that a facility continues to commit the same infractions over and over again, then it's very obvious that the management is not complying with the licensing officer's directives," said Galley. "They are being allowed to do so, because there are no penalties."

Responsibility for keeping residential-care facilities operating smoothly and in compliance with regulations is spread equally among all parties involved, said Galley.

"I hold the management totally responsible for inappropriate behaviour, but, at the same time, you have a licensing office that is supposed to be making sure that these facilities are run properly and that these facilities are delivering a good quality of care," she said. "If they are not enforcing the rules, if they are allowing these facilities to continue making infractions, then you can put the responsibility on them."

A lack of oversight by the Ministry of Health also contributes to the problem of continuous non-compliance by these facilities, said Galley.

"The health minister is the one who is supposed to be watching over all the health authorities to make sure they are indeed doing their jobs, and that is obviously not happening," she said. "There is a major lack of oversight, and it goes all the way from the health minister right down to the individual managers of each facility and the licensing office."

Galley also raised concerns about discrepancies on the IH inspection reports.

Each inspection report begins with the Bill of Rights; beside each of the 26 items, the report states if the facility is in compliance or not.

Number 18 of the Bill of Rights asks if the facility is "operated in a manner that promotes the health, safety and dignity of persons in care and their rights."

"Nine times out of 10, it says they are complying with No. 18, but when you scroll down, many of the infractions have to do with the direct care and supervision of the seniors," said Galley. "It's a total and complete contradiction. You can't have 14 infractions that all have to do with the quality of care and then say that yes, they are complying with the quality of care."

Looking into this apparent discrepancy, Lively also expressed confusion about it.

"I can see how our current inspection form on the public site is creating confusion, and I will work to resolve that," she said. "There seems to be an incongruence of a citation of a regulation . . . there's something not right in our database."

Inconsistencies with inspection reports and the number of facilities with continued infractions as reported by licensing officers demonstrate a desperate need for increased accountability, said Galley.

"The lack of oversight certainly displays a lack of concern for the quality of care that seniors are receiving."



GARY NYLANDER/The Daily Courier

Easter bonnet

Edie Roy shows off her Easter bonnet during an Easter brunch Thursday at Kelowna's Parkinson Recreation Centre. Julien Laforce also celebrated his 101st birthday with about 100 people attending. The brunch included an Easter bonnet parade, and food for the event included roasted potatoes, ham, crepes, french toast, eggs and fruit, all made by volunteers.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

B.C. sheriffs starting to carry assault rifles

Penticton sheriff among 1st in Interior to be issued new weaponry due to concerns about increase in gang members in jail system

By JOE FRIES
Penticton Herald

An increase in the number of gang-affiliated prisoners in the jail system has prompted B.C. Sheriff Services to begin issuing assault rifles to its members, according to a union official.

Sheriffs are responsible for transporting prisoners from jails and police stations to their court appearances, and for ensuring safety inside courthouses.

Most are already equipped with a pistol and pepper spray, but a select few now have been armed with semi-automatic weapons; more will be issued as training permits.

"The prisoners that sheriffs are transporting today are more dangerous and high-profile than they were even 10 years ago, and with more gang-affiliated prisoners and the need to keep up with the times, sheriffs have gone to carrying assault rifles on some of the high-profile escorts," said B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union spokesman Dean Purdy, who represents the officers.

He said courthouse security is also a concern. "We had a sawed-off shotgun enter the Penticton courthouse, and that's just one example of what we're up against now," said Purdy,

referring to an incident last July that led to criminal charges against a man who allegedly carried the weapon into the building inside a tool box and then stashed it outside after arousing sheriffs' suspicion.

The Ministry of Justice, which oversees sheriffs, declined to make anyone available for an interview and refused to say how many officers have so far been armed with assault rifles.

"For security measures to remain effective, we do not disclose specifics of training or equipment," the ministry said in a statement, which did acknowledge distribution of the new weaponry began several years ago.

The Herald has learned, however, that a handful of sheriffs from the B.C. Interior — including one stationed in Penticton — just received their training and guns last fall.

Penticton lawyer Paul Varga has no concerns about the conditions in the justice system that triggered the need for more firepower, nor the presence of those weapons in courthouses.

"Our sheriffs are the best in the province," he said, "and I'll tell you why: Their greatest weapon is their voice and their presence, not any weapon they're carrying on their tool belts."

Varga, a former managing editor of the Herald, noted local lawyers meet regularly with sheriffs to discuss safety concerns at the courthouse and are always impressed by their professionalism.

"If they feel that they need to have (assault rifles) for their protection because they're targets, then that's fine," he said.

"I'm also very comfortable that those guys know what they're doing with those weapons."

VALLEY IN BRIEF

\$1.25 million raised by United Way

Costco employees were the most generous workers in supporting United Way this year, final figures from the local campaign show.

They contributed almost \$95,000, or about eight per cent of the entire \$1.25 million raised by United Way of the Central and South Okanagan-Similkameen.

Employees of the Bank of Montreal raised \$60,000. Across the Valley, United Way is supported by more than 80 workplace campaigns, which see donations deducted regularly from paycheques for ease of giving.

The fundraising total was 85 per cent of the \$1.5-million goal the umbrella fundraising agency set when it began this year's campaign.

"Despite the state of the economy, our community continues to support United Way, making an extraordinary impact throughout the Okanagan-Similkameen," United Way executive director Shelley Gilmore said in a news release.

MP promotes federal budget

Veterans, families with children and low-income seniors will benefit from the federal budget announced this week, says Kelowna-Lake Country MP Stephen Fuhr.

"Beginning in July, families with children will benefit from the new Canada child benefit, which will provide families with a maximum tax-free benefit of up to \$6,400 per child under the age of six, and up to \$5,400 per child aged six through 17," said Fuhr in a news release on Thursday.

The government is also increasing the guaranteed income supplement for seniors and reopening the Kelowna Veterans Affairs office, which the previous Conservative government had closed, he said.

Top of Knox now accessible by car

Knox Mountain Drive is now open all the way to the top.

The scenic roadway has been open to the first lookout since March 11, but the City of Kelowna was waiting until temperatures were consistently above zero to open the rest.

That happened this morning.

Knox Mountain Drive is open to vehicles 9:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday to Saturday, and noon to 9 p.m. on Sundays. It will open earlier this Sunday to allow people attending an outdoor Easter service to get in.

Knox Mountain Park is open daily between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m.

— The Daily Courier

Refugees

Continued from page A1

"There is so much conflicting information floating around," said Allison Murray, who has been working with a group of Toronto residents since the fall to put together the funds to sponsor a family.

"Our group is trying to be patient."

It's never been clear exactly how many privately sponsored Syrians would be accepted. There had been no caps on applications under the Conservatives or in the early part of the Liberal program.

As of March 14, there were 6,644 private cases in the inventory. Groups have been notified a cap will be placed on the number of applications accepted — as has been the custom for other refugee populations in recent years — but aren't sure yet what it is.

Immigration Minister John McCallum said he is aware the enthusiasm to support Syrians won't last forever.

"We want to create the conditions where Canadians are able and as quickly as possible to sponsor those refugees," he said.

Arrivals of refugees have slowed considerably since the government stopped running its own flights.

Between Feb. 27 and March 8, 600 new government-assisted refugees and 433 privately sponsored arrived. In the 12 days after, only nine government-assisted refugees and 16 privately sponsored arrived. Only one person who is part of a program that blends the two streams arrived in that time.

While the government is still covering the flight costs for government-assisted refugees, it has stopped doing so for privately sponsored ones who've yet to be interviewed. They will now either be forced to take out a government loan or have their sponsors pay the fare.

The loan program was slammed in a government evaluation for placing an unfair burden on new arrivals. McCallum had promised it was under review.

THE DAILY COURIER

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FINANCIAL MARKETS

TSX composite	13,358.11 -21.37	▼
Dow index	17,515.73 +13.14	▲
Oil futures (May contract)	US\$39.46 -\$0.33	▼
Canadian dollar	75.53 US -0.15	▼
Gold futures (April contract)	US\$1,221.60 -\$2.40	▼

Weakness in commodities and Canadian financial stocks helped the Toronto stock market slide into the red Thursday, capping a holiday-shortened trading week.

The S&P/TSX composite index lost 21.37 points at 13,358.11.

The May contract for benchmark North American crude oil slipped 33 cents to US\$39.46 a barrel.

The commodity-sensitive loonie was down 0.15 of a U.S. cent at 75.53 cents U.S. as April gold lost \$2.40 to US\$1,221.60 a troy ounce.

— The Canadian Press

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

TODAY

Easter egg hunt

Approximately 15,000 eggs for kids to find, plus a pancake breakfast will be served. This free event is hosted by Victory Life Fellowship. Location: Parkinson Recreation Centre. Time: 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

SATURDAY

Easter egg hunt

Hundreds of Easter eggs, so come early and get the eggs and a pancake breakfast. Location: Kelowna Hyundai. 3260 Highway 97 N. Time: 10 a.m.

Email: calendar@ok.bc.ca