

Residents hold protest over offender

By Mark Pavilons

Residents braved the cold on Saturday to renew their efforts and show their dismay at the fact a high-risk offender is living in the area.

The protest, staged by members of Incarcerate Sex Offenders in Society (iSOSnow.ca), was meant to draw attention to the case. Keith Theodore Constantin was placed last week in a rural facility outside of Schomberg in December. Constantin was released following a four-year jail term for sexual assault with a weapon, and an 18-month term for violating his curfew conditions. His rap sheet includes sexually assaulting a seven-year old boy, sexually assaulting a 45-year-old blind woman, robbing two variety stores with a starter pistol, and raping and beating a woman at knife-point.

The purpose of the protest, according to group member Susan Heslop, was to let Christian Horizons and MPP Helena Jacek know that we are aware of their plans to continue housing dangerous offenders in our area and we strongly object. We want these offenders put in a more secure location, with closer police response and away from any small community.

We are paying to protect him from us; we should be paying to protect us from him.

Heslop added protesting is an important part of democracy.

Protesting is awesome! I highly recommend it, she said. I have a nine-year-old son, and I want him to see that his mother is a fighter, and she stands up for what's right!

According to group member Amy Castellano, Constantin resides in a unlocked group home run by Christian Horizons. He lives there under minimal security. He is so dangerous, not able to live in society with out harming others. He must be institutionalized before he claims a fourth victim, she said.

The house, in a rural area near Highway 9 and Highway 27 in Schomberg, is not close to law enforcement and out of the jurisdiction for Simcoe and Caledon. Many residents in the area are not aware that he is there, according to Castellano.

Police note he is bound by an order under section 810.2 of the Criminal Code and his conditions include: Not to be alone with anyone under the age of 16 unless the minor is accompanied by a responsible adult over 18; not to be present in any day care, swimming area and/or public swimming area, school ground or playground where one might reasonably expect children to be present or any community centre where children are present; abstain absolutely from the possession, purchase or consumption of drugs, narcotics, controlled substances or marihuana, except in accordance with a medical prescription; abstain absolutely from possession, purchase or consumption of alcohol or alcohol-based products.

He is currently under strict supervision and the York Regional Police High-Risk Offender Unit and the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services Probation and Parole Office will continue to monitor his activities.

The group is still collecting signatures for its petition. Visit iSOSnow.ca to sign the petition and for more information about the high risk violent sex offender.

According to the group's website:

We need to ensure this sex offender not only relocates from the King Township area but most importantly also receive the rehabilitation he requires in a permanent and secure institution. We find it outrageous that our government officials would allow a person with such a criminal resume to move into a neighbourhood with such a high density of children and families.

Local politicians support the residents.

I applaud the efforts of the community as the goal is the relocate Keith Constantin to a more appropriate location that has the rehabilitation services and is close to a police station, said Mayor Steve Pellegrini.

The demonstration is a clear indication of how the community feels about this offender being placed here in King Township, said Councillor Bill Cober. Nobody is supportive of this placement.

While local politicians support the residents, they caution them about placing any sort of signs along the roadways.

Mayor Pellegrini said local bylaws prohibit it, to prevent sign pollution and protect public safety. Signs tend to distract drivers, he observed.

I think it is important to note that while the matter is deeply concerning to many residents, other members of the community may not respond positively to a local advertising campaign on this issue. I would also add that while this issue is extremely difficult for parents to address with their children, the signs may raise more questions than they answer for parents and children that travel through the area but are not residents of Schomberg and surrounding villages. I think there is a respectful dialogue that can be had on this issue that does not require the installation of signage that is outside of the provisions of the Township's sign bylaw and may not be permitted by the Region of York or Ministry of Transportation on their roads, Pellegrini said.