

NEWS

Police make a 'mess'

Latest West End bashing preventable

GAY-BASHING

Robin Perelle

POLICE HANDLING of a recent bashing has left the victim and other gays saying relations between the queer community and the city's cops need a lot of work.

But the West End's top cop says he's committed to ironing out the bugs.

Velvet Steel says the officers she dealt with on Sep 17 were uncooperative and rude, harkening back to the bad old days when cops routinely dismissed gay complaints and refused to investigate gay-bashings.

In this case, the lead officer neither gave Steel a file number nor made any arrests at the scene, even though the suspects were still present. The officer also refused to hand over her business card and even suggested that Steel was the one breaking the law, Steel says.

Steel, a respected small business owner and post-operation transsexual, says she no longer feels protected by the Vancouver Police Department (VPD)—particularly since the attack could have

been prevented.

The evening of Sep 17 began ordinarily enough for Steel and her husband, Ray Pichette. They had dinner at Andale's Mexican restaurant on Davie St, then took their usual route home at around 10 pm. As they approached the little park at the corner of Cardero and Comox, they ran into a group of about nine teenagers loudly calling people "fags" and "dykes."

Steel immediately called 911. Though an officer arrived within minutes, all he did was disperse the teens. He did not ask them for any identification, Steel says disgustedly. "The officer basically huffed his shoulders at me, got in his car and drove off."

Minutes later, the teens regrouped and converged on Steel and her husband. They allegedly called the couple "fucking faggots"—and then they lunged.

Insp Dave Jones, the VPD's top cop in the West End, admits that the officer who responded to that first call should have done more. He should have asked the teens for identification and filed a report, Jones says. That is policy in a situation where people are making hate-biased comments.

When asked if the attack was



WHEN POLICING FAILS: Velvet Steel suffered broken, swollen fingers, after a bashing that Vancouver police could have prevented.

therefore preventable, Jones pauses. "We're talking chicken and egg, I guess," he finally says. "I don't know."

He says he plans to ask the officer why he failed to follow policy.

Steel is not appeased. Three of her fingers are broken and the bruises on her cheek, leg and foot have yet to completely fade.

One teen, she says, ripped her purse and grocery bag from her shoulders and scattered their contents across the road. When she grabbed him to hold onto him until police could arrive, Steel says

two more teens attacked her husband, hitting him until he fell to the ground and lost his glasses.

Hearing the commotion, a neighbour called 911 and minutes later, officers once again arrived on the scene.

But once again, Steel says they failed her. The officers refused to arrest the teens for assault. Instead, one officer told Steel that she could be arrested for holding the teen until they arrived.

Steel was furious. "This is garbage," she told the officer.

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BRIEFS

Gay council candidates

COPE has nominated one gay and one lesbian candidate to its council slate for the upcoming municipal election. Tim Stevenson and Ellen Woodsworth will carry the COPE mantle, while the new TEAM acclaimed all its candidates, including its gay ones. Alan Herbert, Brent Bazinet and Barney Hickey will run for seats under the TEAM banner. The Non-Partisan Association's nomination meeting is Oct 2. Gay parks board commissioner Duncan Wilson is hoping for a council nomination from the NPA. Wilson's supporters should turn out at the Italian Cultural Centre, 3075 Slocan St. Speeches begin at 6:30 pm.

Celebrities to re-open

With the Celebrities building's sale in the final stage of negotiation, the Kerassiots family has confirmed that the popular gay cabaret will re-open its doors some time in the new year. And it will remain a gay cabaret, says Bill Kerassiots, whose family owns the cabaret's liquor licence and is negotiating with the building's new owner to renew its lease.

Wanted: gay cop advisor

Vancouver Police Department (VPM)