

## **Downtown Ambassador Program Backgrounder**

In December 2007, Vancouver City Council approved a plan to provide funding to supplement the existing DVBIA Ambassador Program and support other Vancouver BIAs that may want to expand their program. Since the Council motion was approved, the DVBIA has been working closely with City of Vancouver staff on a proposal that will:

- increase downtown hours of operation from 16 to 24 hours/day, seven days a week by the end of June
- increase number of Downtown Ambassadors from 16 to approximately 25 before the end of July
- confirm plans to expand Ambassador program to other BIAs in Vancouver - including the West End

Since Council approved the plan in December, DVBIA and City of Vancouver have completed a safety and security needs assessment of all Vancouver BIAs and developed a funding formula based on need and ability to pay. It will be presented next month.

In addition to this progress report, the DVBIA released statistics and a summary of recent incident reports that demonstrate how the Downtown Ambassadors are working with local businesses, residents and the Vancouver Police Department to help fight crime and reduce public disorder.

### **Facts & Statistics**

- Each month, the Ambassadors assist VPD in about 50 arrests by alerting the police to crimes in progress or that have already occurred and by tracking suspects who have committed a crime that Ambassadors have witnessed.
- The number of incidents of open drug use in the DVBIA area has decreased from a high of 140 for a number of months in 2005 to approximately 20 in any given month by the end of 2007.
- The number of drug dealers in the DVBIA as tracked by the Ambassadors has decreased from a high of 60 in 2005 to almost negligible now.
- Each month Ambassadors conduct 4,000-5,000 patrols of parkades looking for tourists or locals in need of assistance, suspicious activity, stolen autos, homeless people sleeping, crimes in progress or crimes that have occurred.
- During summer months, the Downtown Ambassadors can interact with tourists on average 10,000 times a month.
- Downtown Ambassadors interact with panhandlers between 50-150 times per month.
- Each month Ambassadors conduct between 500-1000 'Meet and Greets' with downtown business owners and managers.

- Ambassadors recover 5-10 stolen autos each month.
- The value of stolen property recovered by the Ambassadors has ranged from \$2,000 to \$20,000.

### **Recent Ambassador Success Stories**

- When patrolling a stairwell on Granville St., two suspicious people were spotted along with several coat hangers from the Helly Hansen store and a blow torch. At the same time, the VPD were on site at the Helly Hansen store investigating the break-in. The men were arrested for breaking and entering and possession of stolen property.
- When patrolling a parkade, an Ambassador found several freshly smashed car windows. While on site collecting information about the crimes, a known suspect was seen descending a nearby stairwell and sorting through property. The VPD was called and the suspect was arrested for possession of stolen property and theft from a vehicle.
- An Ambassador approached a vehicle on Mainland that looked suspicious with a man sleeping inside. The Ambassador ran a Stolen Auto Report check and the vehicle came up as stolen. The VPD was contacted and the suspect was arrested for car theft.
- The Ambassadors did a 'meet and greet' with a business who had just reported a theft of merchandise. The Ambassadors took a brief description of two suspects and conducted a patrol of the area. The suspects were located near by with the merchandise still in their possession. The VPD was called and the suspects were taken into custody for possession of stolen property.
- Ambassadors responded to a call from business on Granville St. for a "sleeper". Upon arriving, they found several bystanders standing over a woman lying in the alley with one person on the phone with 911. An Ambassador took over the call for the bystander who was having difficulty relaying information. Paramedics arrived and took the woman to hospital with severe pneumonia.
- Ambassadors received a call from the Delta Suites Hotel regarding a missing elderly woman who suffers from Alzheimer's disease who was separated from her husband. The Ambassadors took a description of the missing woman and located her approximately ten minutes later. The Ambassador introduced himself and advised her that he would escort her back to the hotel to rendezvous with her husband. Upon arrival, hotel staff was advised of her being located and a call to the VPD was cancelled.
- Ambassadors were called to assist local security at a parking lot with the removal of a difficult person sleeping on site. The added presence of the Ambassador convinced the sleeper to get up and gather his items, only to discover his shoes had been stolen. Knowing some lost and found shoes were collected back at the Ambassadors' office close to his shoe size, the Ambassador requested that security allow him to remain in the lot under their supervision for 10 minutes while he traveled back to the office to retrieve a pair of shoes as it was raining and cold that day. The

Ambassador returned with the shoes and gave them to the very appreciative man who put them on and left the parkade.

**Today's progress report is further to recent announcements by Mayor Sullivan related to achieving Project Civil City goals and objectives. These include:**

- recommended funding for 96 new police officers – in addition to 140 new full-time VPD employees announced over past two years
- supported investment in VPD for more Entertainment District closures on Granville Street
- renewed support for community police centres across Vancouver
- establish Vancouver crime-free housing initiative
- tougher by-laws fines & proposals for improved collection procedures
- increased federal funding for drug addiction & mental health services in Downtown Eastside
- more than 3000 units of social and supportive housing in development
- plan to establish dumpster free zones & increase street cleaning services

**Finally, here is some general background info on the Ambassadors from the DVBIA for your immediate reference:**

Downtown Ambassadors are funded by the 8,000 businesses and property owners in the 90-blocks of the DVBIA's area through a levy. They serve as proactive "eyes and ears" on our streets for businesses, residents and tourists by providing a variety of functions, including:

- respond to calls concerning specific incidents (suspicious persons, first aid situations, tourists with special needs)
- provide an effective street presence
- monitoring & deterring criminal activities in parking facilities & other areas accessible to the public
- report crime & "quality of life" concerns to appropriate agencies
- complete concise daily incident reports on issues attended to & follow-up with other agencies to effect resolution of problems
- walking services to escort employees & visitors to their vehicles where safety might be a concern
- assist the public with inquiries about the district, its businesses & services

**The Ambassadors are equipped with the following:**

- two-way radios & cell phones
- digital cameras & first aid kits
- bikes & flashlights
- hand-held pocket PCs to track stolen cars - in partnership with ICBC, BC Crime Prevention Association & Community Police Centre

- visitor information including maps & brochures

**The Ambassador training includes:**

- a thorough orientation about the role & goals of DVBIA
- general instruction, role playing & guest speakers
- an outline of acceptable conduct, attitude, etiquette, rules & regulations
- awareness training that addresses community sensitivity & cultural diversity
- first aid
- familiarity with equipment & its use
- safety & crime prevention monitoring techniques
- knowledge about downtown, its attractions & activities
- legal parameters of the role, including the management of incidents such as crimes in progress, violence, disorderly conduct or vandalism
- hospitality & customer-service skills
- knowledge of the Vancouver Police Department's Stolen Auto Recovery program
- conflict resolution & mediation
- incident-reporting procedures & report-writing