

Security network aims to fight crime

Downtown BIZ to share into instantly

By Aldo Santin

THE Downtown BIZ is set to launch a new security initiative that will link all participating building owners and business operators into a communications network.

Modelled after successful similar programs in Portland, Oregon, and Minneapolis, the Winnipeg Downtown Security Network will allow participants to share information about criminal activity and unruly behaviour in-

stantaneously with all members.

"Can you imagine every (downtown) building owner as part of this network and as soon as something happens downtown everyone on the network knows about it?" Stefano Grande, executive director of the Downtown Business Improvement Zone (BIZ), said.

Grande said similar initiatives in Portland and Minneapolis are being credited with a dramatic decline in the crime rates in the downtown areas of those communities, adding he expects the same will happen here.

Grande said the network will link all participating members so that if any one member reports an incident, the information is transmitted instantly to all members and to the Winnipeg Police Service.

Grande said a demonstration of how the network will function happened two

weeks ago when security personnel at Cityplace were notified of a theft from a business in the mall. Mall security provided a description of the suspects to the adjacent MTS Centre security and the Downtown BIZ's Downtown Watch. The suspects were spotted within minutes, police were contacted and the suspects arrested.

"Imagine someone walks out of an office building with two stolen laptops," Grande said of a likely scenario. "The images of the suspects are caught on building security cameras. Those images are transmitted to all members on the network.

"With BlackBerrys and iPhones, images and videos can be transmitted instantly."

The initiative has drawn the endorsement of the Winnipeg Police Service, which has agreed to participate.

Insp. Dave Thorne said the network will provide police with a real-time snapshot of daily events, adding the information police learn will help them provide better policing. Police will participate in bi-monthly meetings, review activity reports and provide related workshops to network members.

Kevin Donnelly, senior vice-president and general manager of the MTS Centre, said the facility has operated its own security network with Portage Place and Cityplace, adding the success of that venture demonstrated the potential advantages of a downtown-wide network.

"Seeing the success of our own security network on a small scale, I can see how a network on a larger scale could benefit the entire downtown," Donnelly, who is also chairman of the Downtown BIZ safety committee, said.

Grande said participation in the network is free to all Downtown BIZ members. It's being offered to businesses and building owners in the Exchange District and the West End at a cost. Grande said the Winnipeg Parking Authority has agreed to participate, adding that means the WPA's downtown parking officers can extend the reach of the network.

When the network goes public, Grande said a poster and billboard campaign will be directed at pedestrians and vehicle occupants in the downtown area. Grande said the public campaign will encourage people to call a number if they're bothered by panhandlers, drunks or if they see other negative behaviour. A telephone number for the campaign hasn't been set up yet.

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