

**2015 RECIPIENTS**

**Infamous 'Mercedes couple' is nabbed by veteran Saint-Lazare sergeant-detective for robbing 70 residences**

Between December 2012 and May 2014, the town of Saint-Lazare, located about 45 minutes west of Montreal, experienced a wave of residential break-ins. While most of the 70 reported infractions took place in Saint-Lazare, 13 neighbouring towns were also hit. The targets were always high-end residences, and by the time police added up the losses, the suspects had stolen more than $1 million worth of belongings, including jewellery and money.

In March 2013, investigators with the Sûreté du Québec made their big break in the case when they studied the images from a surveillance camera of a home that had just been robbed. The video showed a woman with a fur coat and hood getting out of a Mercedes that was parked in front of the house – a Mercedes which did not belong to its occupants. The woman was then seen looking inside a window of the house. Shortly after, the residence's alarm system was disconnected.

The robbers used the same MO each time. After consulting Revenu Québec's online *Registre des entreprises du Québec* (Quebec's business registry), they targeted the homes of specific business owners who had left town to go on vacation. After carefully staking out the residences and making sure they were vacant, the robbers returned to the houses and cut the alarm systems.

The key to the investigation was the Mercedes. In fact, once charges were laid, the case made media headlines, and the robbers quickly became known as the *Mercedes couple*. Officers traced the car to 27-year-old Elyanne Miller and her husband, 30-year-old Jimmy Simard-Patry, who faced a total of 70 criminal charges in relation to the break-ins. In the end, Simard-Patry was sentenced to five years in jail, while Miller received two years. A third suspect is awaiting trial.

The SQ used everything they had to nail the suspects: officers hid a GPS monitor underneath the Mercedes, they conducted surveillance and obtained search warrants for the couple's condo, and carefully monitored their iPhone conversations and text messages.

Patience and countless hours of work were necessary to nab Miller and Simard-Patry. And the lead investigator in the case -- veteran Sgt. Det. Gordon Hunter -- is one of the main reasons the case became such an important investigation by the SQ. Hunter painstakingly retraced each and every break-in to link all 70 incidents to the couple. Without Hunter's diligence, the break-ins would have continued.

This is not the first time Hunter has exemplified excellence in police work. In 1994, as a 28-year-old member of the Saint-Lazare Police Service, he was recognized for his quick action when he and his partner helped deliver a baby after responding to a 911 call about a woman about to give birth inside her residence.

For his most recent investigative work, a *2015 Quebec Police Award* is presented to **Sgt. Det. Gordon Hunter** of the Sûreté du Québec's Vaudreuil-Soulanges Ouest detachment.

**An expert in national security and community builder: it's all in a day's work for RCMP sergeant**

Threats to national security can come in many forms, and Canada certainly is not immune to any potential attack. Working together, and knowing how to recognize signs of a menace and how to process information that is brought forward are all key to fostering change and making sure that all Canadians live in safe communities.

Although their ideologies and motivations may differ, terrorists share one thing in common — they plan their attacks. This planning exposes indicators that can become apparent in the days, weeks or months prior to an attack. The discovery of one of these indicators, when put in a broader context, could help prevent an attack.

Sgt. Hakim Bellal was assigned to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's National Security Investigations Program in 2011, and again, from December 2012 to March 2014 as the program's only coordinator. Since then, his program has received more resources, and Bellal has accomplished many goals and surpassed all objectives set forth in three areas: awareness and police officer training, awareness workshops for the private sector, and community outreach and prevention.

Bellal, who works out of Montreal's C Division, developed preventive approach strategies with RCMP investigators looking into subjects of interest and their families. Officers developed skills, understanding and knowledge regarding national security issues and the environment in which these issues are found.

Bellal has also been closely involved with his community. He came to the help of local boxer Ali Nestor and his non-profit organization, *Les Princes de la rue*, by organizing a fundraiser for the east-end group and obtaining computers and dictionaries for the teens that Nestor was helping in an effort to get them to return to school.

Bellal has also participated in soccer tournaments for Montreal youth in collaboration with the Montreal Police Department, as well as helped organize community dinners during Ramadan and police-awareness days for youth.

Through his knowledge about national security and his unparalleled community involvement, **Sgt. Hakim Ballel** has not only brought a positive light on the RCMP's National Security Investigations Program, but earned him a *2015 Quebec Police Award*.

**Motorist saved from drowning by 2 SQ officers near Rimouski**

Mike Jérôme Ruest was driving to work on Highway 132 in Sainte-Angèle de Merici shortly before 5 a.m. on May 15, 2015 when he fell asleep at the wheel of his truck.

"When I opened my eyes, it was too late, I was in the air," Ruest recalls, adding that his truck slammed into the Mitis River, about 45 kilometres east of Rimouski. Once it hit the frigid water, Ruest's truck quickly drifted towards the centre of the river. Witnesses who saw the vehicle's lights in the river contacted the Sûreté du Québec.

"I wasn't able to unbuckle my seatbelt," said Ruest. "I forced it so much that I had cracks in my hands and ribs, and one of my kidneys was torn."

Suddenly, a groggy Ruest heard tapping on the window. It was Sgt. Gilles Dionne of the SQ, who had jumped into the cold water and was now standing on top of the submerged truck. Meanwhile, as the truck floated in the river, Dionne's partner, Const. Élizabeth Carrier, was standing on the shore, holding on to a rope and a buoy that was attached to Dionne's waist.

Both officers quickly realized that there was no time to wait for backup. The river's current was very strong, and Ruest had by now lost consciousness. As they waited for firefighters to reach the scene, Dionne smashed the rooftop window of the truck and saw that the water was rising inside the vehicle. Dionne reached down and held Ruest's head above the water.

When firefighters arrived, they immediately moved in and, with Dionne's assistance, managed to remove the victim out of his truck and transported him into a boat, before taking him to hospital.

Receiving *2015 Quebec Police Awards* for their heroic actions are **Sgt. Gilles Dionne** and **Const. Élizabeth Carrier** of the SQ's La Mitis, Gaspésie/Les Îles detachment.

**Project Lorgnette dismantles international network of debit card fraudsters**

In August 2012, the Sûreté du Québec launched *Project Lorgnette*, a multi-police-agency investigation into a vast network that involved the fraudulent use of debit cards in Quebec, Canada and around the world. As the investigation revealed, the Montreal-based criminal organization was involved in the sophisticated manipulation of point-of-sale (POS) terminals in shopping centres across North America and Europe. The scheme bilked $12-million from more than 30,000 debit card users.

Arrests were made in October 2013 by the Economic Crimes Unit of the Sûreté du Québec and took place in Montreal, Laval, Longueuil, Boucherville, Chambly and Magog, and led to the detention of 15 individuals, including the head of the criminal network from Boucherville.

Cooperation in the investigation was received from the Canadian Bankers' Association, Fraud and Payment Brigade of the Regional Directorate of the Judicial Police of Paris (which initiated the investigations on this network in France), the **Forensic Science Laboratory of the** French Gendarmerie (which provided technical support), the German Bundeskriminalamt (BKA) and Europol, which provided support and operational coordination.

The network is alleged to have orchestrated fraud with a potential loss of $12 million outside Canada. Criminals were able to compromise card data from debit cards. Their method of operation was to tamper with POS terminals, which allowed fraudsters to intercept customers' bank data without their knowledge. The data was then transferred throughout Quebec to be decrypted and re-routed abroad where counterfeit cards were made to exploit the stolen data connected to individual customer bank accounts.

Police learned that the pieces used to modify the cash registers were built in Quebec and sent to China, where they were mass-produced for the criminal organization. The probe discovered that the suspects would switch POS debit card terminals in European grocery stores for fraudulent ones using a duffel bag with a false bottom containing the tampered-with machines. Once the terminals were switched, the fraudsters could access debit card and PIN numbers.

On October 21, 2014, *Project Lorgnette* moved into its final phase when investigators presented their case in Plattsburgh before officers with the New York State Police, as well as US Customs and border patrol services and the FBI.

Investigators with the Laval and Longueuil police services worked on the investigation with the SQ.

For their efforts in nabbing these fraudsters, the following officers are being rewarded with *2015 Quebec Police Awards*:

From the Sûreté du Québec: **Lt. François Gaudet**, **Sgt. Det. Michèle Boily**, **Sgt. Caroline Chiquette**, **Sgt. Det. Jean Barnett**, **Sgt. Jean-François Chénier**, and **Sgt. Karine St-Jean**.

From the Laval Police Service: **Sgt. Det. François Dumais.**

From the Longueuil Police Service: **Sgt. Det. Philippe St-Cyr**.

**SQ officers in Taschereau save the life of a missing suicidal man in -30 weather**

At 9 p.m. on February 5, 2015, Sgt. Dany Bédard of the Sûreté du Québec's Abitibi-Ouest detachment received a 911 call about the disappearance of Maxime Roussy-Vaillancourt, a 31-year-old suicidal man from Taschereau who had recently experienced a breakup with his spouse. The depressed man had been gone for two hours, and was wearing very little clothing.

Bédard immediately mobilized his entire SQ unit, including Constables Patrick Petit, Jésabel Blanchette and Marc-Antoine Noël. The extremely cold weather conditions -- it was about minus-30 degrees Celsius that night -- made the disappearance urgent, and because it was a question of time, Bédard launched an immediate ground-level search.

Officers Noël and Blanchette soon spotted footprints in the snow that led to a snowmobile path. The officers followed the lead for three kilometres until they located the man, who was lying in the snow in an advanced state of hypothermia. After alerting their colleagues, the officers quickly realised that it was difficult to move the victim because he was almost six feet tall and weighed about 270 pounds. The officers removed their coats and placed it on Roussy‑Vaillancourt and began body compressions for more than an hour.

Meanwhile, Bédard and Petit waited nearby for an emergency crew to bring them a sled. When it arrived, the officers learned that the emergency services did not have a snowmobile, so they drove in their cruiser to a nearby residence, where they awoke the occupant and requested to use his snowmobile. Moments later, Bédard and Petit were on the scene where their colleagues were tending to Roussy‑Vaillancourt.

Roussy‑Vaillancourt was rushed to hospital, where he had four fingers and a foot amputated. Despite his injuries, doctors were quick to say that the actions of the SQ officers had saved Roussy‑Vaillancourt's life.

For their heroics that night, *2015 Quebec Police Awards* are presented to **Sgt. Dany Bédard** and **Constables Patrick Petit**, **Jésabel Blanchette** and **Marc-Antoine Noël**.

**RCMP probe nails criminal network that used online phishing to lure innocent victims as unwitting cocaine trafficking mules**

In February 2013, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's Drug Section in Montreal launched Project Cellophane. The investigation revealed that a criminal organization based in Montreal stole money from victims after recruiting them through an Internet phishing campaign, telling each victim that they had inherited money, had won a lottery, or would make money after transferring funds from a foreign country to Canada. The goal was to obtain money from each phishing victim.

Once the criminal organization had obtained large amounts of cash from their victims, they took their scheme to a higher level by setting up meetings between the victims and two Nigerian nationals in a Montreal hotel.

The two men displayed a suitcase loaded with cash, explaining that the money had been altered with ink and a chemical product could remove the ink. After demonstrating the ink removal, the victims were instructed to bring the suitcases to South America, where the money would be cleaned, and to bring it back to Montreal. Unbeknownst to the victims, the suitcases actually carried concealed quantities of cocaine.

Project Cellophane identified 18 innocent victims -- many of whom were caught by authorities and jailed in Canada, the United States, Peru and Equator. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Project Cellophane's three investigators and one civil employee, several of the victims were released from prison and all charges were dropped.

On March 3, 2015, the two accused -- John Nwoko and Charles Ifezue -- pleaded guilty to six charges, including cocaine importation and conspiracy, and were handed lengthy prison sentences.

Were it not for the perseverance of Cpl. Martin Crête and Constables Dany Turcot and Chris Smith, the Canadians arrested for possession of large amounts of cocaine would still be languishing in prison cells. And thanks to the expertise and analyses of RCMP civilian member Pierre Gauthier, investigators were able to obtain information on the MO of this criminal organization and take action.

For their outstanding work, *2015 Quebec Police Awards* are presented to RCMP **Cpl. Martin Crête**, and **Constables Chris Smith** and **Dany Turcot**, as well as to RCMP analyst **Pierre Gauthier**.

**Quick action by two SQ officers in Témiscamingue saves a family from their burning house in nearby Thorne, Ontario**

While Brigitte Loiselle and Denis Dion are still picking up the pieces, almost a year after a devastating fire completely destroyed their home in the tiny community of Wyse, Ontario, across the river from Témiscamingue, on December 10, 2014, they are thankful to be alive. And they are especially thankful for the vigilance of two police officers from the Sûreté du Québec's Témiscamingue detachment.

At 2:30 a.m., patrolling officers Patrick Kasysongdeth and Guillaume Bastien were on the Quebec side of the Outaouais River when they heard a loud noise and spotted flames engulfing a garage and quickly spreading to a nearby house on the Ontario side of the river. The officers raced to the scene as they alerted the Ontario Provincial Police and firefighters.

Kasysongdeth and Bastien reached the house on Wyse Rd. Once they entered the residence, they awoke the occupants and led them outside to safety. They then evacuated a neighbouring house that was in danger of being engulfed by flames. Moments later, firefighters, ambulance technicians and OPP officers were on the scene.

In the end, the two SQ officers saved the lives of every occupant, including two parents, three children and a five-year-old grandson. The house was a complete loss, as were all of the Christmas gifts that the family had gathered.

Had Constables Kasysongdeth and Bastien not acted quickly and shown such courage in a situation where each second counted -- and had the two officers simply advised the OPP of the incident, given that the fire was not in the SQ's jurisdiction -- the incident would have definitely ended tragically.

In the end, the two officers set aside jurisdictional rules and went beyond the call of duty to respond and save lives.

For their courage and quick action, *2015 Quebec Police Awards* are presented to **Constables Patrick Kasysongdeth** and **Guillaume Bastien**.

**RCMP and SQ work together to bring fraud charges against former Quebec lieutenant-governor Lise Thibault**

In June 2007, Quebec's minister responsible for Canadian intergovernmental affairs filed an official request with the Sûreté du Québec's director general to investigate the findings of the province's auditor general into spending discrepancies by former Quebec lieutenant-governor Lise Thibault.

At the same time, Canada's Canadian Heritage Minister requested that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's C Division also launch an investigation.

The probe was assigned to a team of investigators with the economic crimes divisions of the SQ and the RCMP. The investigation -- dubbed *Project Claudia* (RCMP) and *Project Doyen* -- focused on Thibault's 10-year mandate on behalf of the Quebec and Canadian governments.

The delicate investigation meant that officers had to navigate through government systems and departments that oversee all claims and subsidies, both in Quebec City and in Ottawa. The documented evidence was thick and required a meticulous analysis that stretched over several months. What resulted was a key report by an accounting forensics expert, which led to recommendations that charges be filed against Thibault.

Thibault was charged with four counts of fraud, two counts of breach of trust, and two counts of forgery. Prosecutor Marcel Guimont is credited with bringing this case to a successful conclusion in a most exemplary fashion as the investigation faced many bureaucratic hurdles.

On September 30, 2015, Thibault was sentenced to 18 months in prison and ordered to repay $300,000 to both levels of government. Thibault is appealing the sentence.

Receiving *2015 Quebec Police Awards* for their work on this case:

From the RCMP: **Cpl. Jean-Maurice Ouellette** (retired), **Cpl. Jean-Alexandre Bouchard** and **Sgt. Éric St-Cyr**.

From the SQ: **Supervising Sgt. Serge Lachance**, **Sgt. Jean-Michel Néron**, **Sgt. Robert Anctil** (retired) and accountant **Jacinthe Senneville**.