

CSI HALTON: POLICE COUNT DOWN TO LAUNCH OF NEW FORENSICS LAB

THE NEW LAB AT HALTON POLICE HEADQUARTERS WILL ALLOW FOR BETTER PROTECTION OF EVIDENCE - AND YOU CAN DRIVE A CAR INSIDE.

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The popular consciousness is obsessed with detectives, crime scene investigations and forensics labs - just flip around the TV dial to prove it. It's a fascinating kind of work that requires sharp observation abilities, meticulous attention to detail and a whole swath of technical skills - and for the team of about 24 people who do it in Halton Region, it's about to get even better.

Halton police's forensic services unit is getting a brand new lab this month, as the force opens the doors to its brand new headquarters on Bronte Road. The new lab will

help investigators better maintain the quality of their evidence, meaning more accurate results for cases going to court.

"The new lab includes significant changes to how we will protect evidence from contamination or cross-contamination," said Staff Sgt. Rhonda Alcock, a former investigator who now manages the unit. "It's going to be a huge improvement on what we have now."

The lab in the old headquarters is comprised of one large room with separate workstations, she said, while the new facility will have three distinct labs in different rooms. Evidence is always carefully protected, Alcock explained, adding that one can't be too careful



Graham Paine/Metroland

Halton Regional Police are set to open their new headquarters on North Service Road in Oakville, the new facility is almost four times larger than their current building.

when dealing with biological matter.

"Everywhere we go, we leave something of ourselves behind," she said, explaining that the new lab has a vestibule area where investigators can "gown up" before going in-

side, something that didn't exist in the old facility. "Then when we exit, there's an area where we would 'gown down' and decontaminate ourselves."

The new lab also includes a special garage

that will allow for better investigations into vehicles involved in incidents.

"It's drive-thru with an overhead catwalk," said Alcock. "It gives us the ability to photograph, examine vehicles, and support the collision reconstruction unit. That's another feature we don't have now."

Alcock's unit includes both civilians and sworn officers, filling roles as varied as DNA co-ordinator, fingerprint clerk and photo file management, in addition to the forensic identification officers and "scenes of crime" officers who we might typically think of when picturing that type of work. The forensics identification officers - two detectives and eight detective constables - are the people authorized to work in the labs.

Alcock explained that certain tasks, like extracting fingerprints from various items, can be done in-house, while DNA evi-

HALTON POLICE FORENSIC SERVICES UNIT ROLES

- Six Scenes of Crime Officers (Constables)
- Eight Forensic Identification Officers (Detective Constables)
- Two Forensic Identification Officers (Detectives)
- One Detective Sergeant
- One Automatic Fingerprint Identification System Operator (Detective Constable)
- One DNA Co-ordinator (Detective Constable)
- Two Fingerprint Clerks (Civilian)
- One Forensic Firearms Analyst (Detective Constable)
- One Forensic Exhibit Clerk (Civilian)
- One Identification Technician (Photo File Management) (Civilian)

dence is sent to the Ontario Centre of Forensic Sciences in Toronto for processing and addition to a national databank.

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