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COMMUNITY

Constable and new police dog make good team

By Howard Mozel

SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

Const. Tori Lean has been assigned as the K9 handler for Baron for only four months now, but she already knows that at the end of his five to seven-year term as a Halton Regional Police dog she's going to keep him.

Such is the relationship that's developed between Lean and the two-and-a-half-year-old male German shepherd.

"It's up to us if we want to do that, but I'd keep him," she said. "I know that already."

Lean is no stranger to that level of certainty, having always wanted to become a police officer since she was a child.

"Each day is never the same thing twice," she said.

Lean was employed as a records clerk with Halton police starting in November 1997. After she had saved enough money to pay for corrective eye surgery in order to qualify as a police officer, she followed her dream and joined Hamilton police in September 2000. She remained in Hamilton for 21 months until the opportunity arose for her to return to Halton and pursue her career as an officer.

A dog lover since her childhood (today she also has two cats), Lean's number one priority was to become a K9 officer so she volunteered her off-duty time as much as possible and assisted the unit while she was on duty. Her goal was attained last October when she was officially hired as the sixth ever Halton Regional Police K9 handler.

"It's an amazing job," she said. "I get to bring my dog to work with me and bring him home."

Baron was born and bred at Lucescu Kennels in Fenwick, Ont. and comes from a long line of police dogs. He began his training as a general purpose police dog at 11 months old and trained in the areas of agility, tracking, obedience, open area and building searches as well as article searches. Lean joined Baron's training in October.

She admitted that since someone else paired them up it took a good three months to finally cement their "interesting relationship," but now there's no turning

back.

"I love him," said Lean, who stressed that Baron is still no pet and lives outside her home in a kennel.

The partners completed a three-month training course together and achieved their certification December 2.

Baron and Lean commenced their official partnership five days later and Baron apprehended his first suspect December 9 — a youth involved with a stolen vehicle who fled on foot. That was exciting, she added, since the incident proved all their hard work together had paid off.

On January 26, Halton Regional Police Services Board Chair Keith Bird shook Baron's paw and officially swore him in as the latest addition to the Police Dog Services Unit — the seventh such police dog hired in the history of the service. (Fortunately, no Halton Regional Police dog has been lost in the line of duty.) Today he shares duties with Honour and Kruz, along with their handlers.

Although shifts are 10 hours long, Lean said that being a K9 officer is a 24/7 commitment, from constantly training (even on days off) to feeding, cleaning Baron's kennel and taking care of his health — things she wouldn't have to worry about with a human partner.

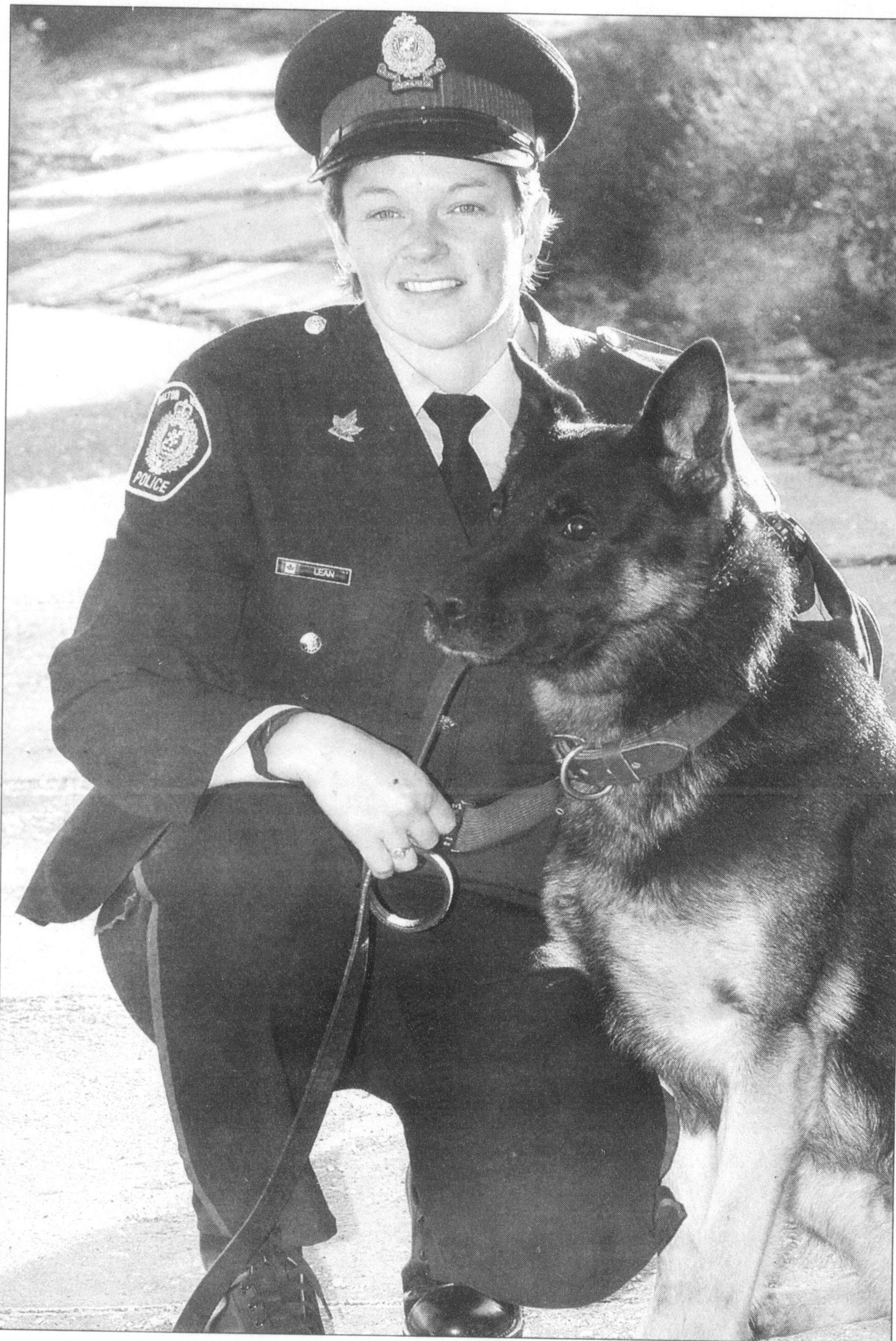
"I wanted this responsibility," she said.

One key to Lean's outlook is the fact she has the opportunity to help people in ways regular police work doesn't offer. To that end, she clears up the popular misconception that police dogs only track, attack and bite bad guys when in fact their value is so much more.

Case in point: Lean and Baron recently found a suicidal man before he could harm himself. She also explained police dogs are ideal for finding lost children and wandering Alzheimer's disease sufferers.

"I wanted to be part of a unit that assists people," she said.

With acute hearing and a sense of smell thousands of times keener than that of humans, Baron is also a valuable extension of Lean's own senses and, the truth be told, a piece of her heart as well.



TAG TEAM: Halton Regional Police Const. Tori Lean and German shepherd police dog Baron have a close partnership as they track down criminals, but they also help people lost and in distress.

BARRIE ERSKINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Programming Schedule — Tuesday, February 28- Monday, March 6, 2006

Tuesday, February 28	Wednesday, March 1	Thursday, March 2	Friday, March 3	Saturday, March 4	Sunday, March 5	Monday, March 6
1:00pm Sports Zone Live (Replay)	1:00pm Halton Hills Council Feb 20 2006	12:00pm Swap Talk (Replay)	1:00pm Halton Region Council Feb 8 2006	4:00pm TVC Sports: Halton HS Boys Hockey Final	10:30am TVC Sports: Halton HS Boys Hockey Final	1:00pm Milton Council Feb 27 2006
5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	4:00pm-6:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	1:00pm Milton Council Feb 27 2006	5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	6:30pm-Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	6:00pm Milton Council Feb 27 2006	4:00pm-8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA
6:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	6:00pm The Bottom Line	4:00pm-7:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	6:00pm-Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA		9:00pm-Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00pm SportsZONE Live
8:00pm Auto Experts (Live)	6:30pm-8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	7:00pm The Bottom Line				9:00pm-Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA
9:00pm Halton Hills Council Feb 20 2006	8:00pm Swap Talk (Live)	7:30pm-9:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA				
	9:00pm Milton Council Feb 27 2006	9:00pm Halton Region Council Mar 1 2006				