

# Police board, association make three-year deal

By Tim Foran  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Halton police officers and civilian members of the force will get wage increases of 9.2 per cent over the next three years as part of a new collective bargaining agreement ratified recently by both the union and the Halton Police Services Board.

The negotiated contract means Halton police will remain in the top five of best-paid officers in the province, based on a first class constable's salary of \$78,418 this year rising to \$83,274 on January 1, 2011. First class constables, which officers become upon entering their fourth year with the force, make up around two-thirds of the police service's 587 uniformed officers.

By comparison, the same level of constable in Toronto will receive \$81,249 in 2010, the last year of that force's current contract.

Halton has been recognized as the region with the lowest crime in the GTA and among the safest large communities in Canada, with only one recorded murder in 2008.

However, salaries for officers aren't based on crime but rather on an assessment of what officers are being paid in the 11 other large police services in the province, said Bob Maich, chair of the seven-member Halton Police Services Board, which also includes regional council members Gary Carr, Colin Best and Carol D'Amelio.

Police in Halton have always been paid the average of what officers in those other jurisdictions receive, said Maich, but the current settlement puts Halton police slightly below the average.

The low crime is due to the quality and excellence of Halton's police service and the participation of residents in the region to help police prevent and combat crime, Maich said.

Asked if Halton's fortunate socioeconomic status — the average household income was \$104,000 in 2006 compared to a provincial average of \$75,000 — was also a factor, Maich responded: "Hypothetically, that can be a factor."

Paul Lacourse, chief administrator for the Halton Regional Police Association, said the new contract drops his members to fifth best paid in the province from their previous number two status. But he said there's only a difference of about \$700 in annual salary from numbers one to 10.

"We think it's a fair deal for both our members and the taxpayers," said Lacourse.

Maich said, despite the wage increases, the board still plans to try to achieve a 2010 budget that would result in no tax increases to Halton property taxpayers, as requested by Halton regional council.

However, with personnel costs accounting for more than 85 per cent of the police budget, the new collective agreement presents a challenge to achieving that target, he admitted.

As has been the case for at least the past 17 years, the current contract was negotiated with no need for job action, said Lacourse.

The agreement is in place until December 31, 2011 and covers Halton police's 587 uniformed officers and 230 civilian administrative staff.

There are only three non-unionized members of the Halton Regional Police Service — the chief and the two deputy chiefs, who work on contracts with salary reviews each year, said Maich.

Chief Gary Crowell earned \$215,000 in salary and taxable benefits in 2008, a 12 per cent increase over 2007, according to provincially-released statistics.

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GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

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