

Enormous challenges ahead for top cop Peter Campbell

By PAUL MITCHISON
Special to The Champion

It seems Halton's new police chief, Peter Campbell, has much in common with the man he's replaced.

That doesn't mean there won't be changes to the Halton Regional Police Service — economic necessity requires it. It will take time before Chief Campbell makes his mark, but the philosophy of the new boss seems very much in tune with the old boss.

Just like former Chief Jim Harding, Chief Campbell is a strong believer in community-based policing, and he's a supporter of hiring more women and minorities.

Mr. Harding had a way with words, often breaking into lengthy, passionate speeches, employing phrases that at times sounded almost Shakespearean.

Chief Campbell doesn't quite match up in eloquence — few people could — but the new chief is comfortable in the world of ideas and has no trouble expressing them. A recent interview showed something of the personality of the 30-year veteran police officer.

"I hope I'm seen as accessible, that I'm seen as a listener. Someone who's not only open to ideas, but who actively solicits ideas and suggestions. I believe in trying to build consensus around issues."

Financial challenges

Chief Campbell arrives on the job facing enormous challenges, especially financial ones. He acknowledges there will be some difficult decisions in the months ahead, while the Halton police service strives to meet the needs of the community with fewer dollars.

The social contract implications, the economic problems of the Ontario government, both will have a dramatic impact.

"Trying to find ways to cope with all those reductions is not going to be easy. It's going to challenge us to the limit," he said. "Austerity is going to make us open up a little more and ask what other ways can we work with the community to solve community crime."

Over the next three years, Halton police will be forced to trim \$1.6 million from their operating budget, currently about \$38 million, he said.

"That's a very significant amount, especially when some 80 per cent is made up of wages. There's not a whole lot of flexibility unless you begin to reduce the number of people you have."

The chief doesn't want to see a reduction in staff, particularly among constables. The supervisory level is a more likely target of budget cutting, he said. For now, cost savings are coming from the employee of the service, through wage rollbacks forced by the social contract legislation.

Community-based policing

"It's the rank and file who're helping us right now, saying things like, 'we won't take overtime, and we'll make our uniforms last a year longer.'"

One of Chief Campbell's priorities is maintaining and boosting the concept of community-based policing — the notion of a cop walking a regular beat, knowing the people in a specific community. "I'm a very strong believer in community policing. I think that's my number one priority."

It's something that's been lost in the modern era of policing, and he

sees a need for officers to embrace it again.

"There are some factors that drove police to act more independently — the fact that they were all put in cars made them more a slave to a radio dispatcher to become aware of the activities on the street," he said.

"We need to go back and retrench. Re-establish the contact that a police officer on the street had. We've been asking people what bothers them. 'What is it that you want? What can we do to restore your quality of life?'"

The new chief shares the same view as Mr. Harding on the controversial issue of employment equity. There must be more women and more visible minority police officers, in order for police to better reflect society, he says.

Credibility

"I'm a strong supporter of aggressive employment equity programs, and affirmative action, to see the police are representative of the community. We're one of the front-line service providers of any government structure. So if we are to have credibility in our society, we should look like that society."

"Mr. Harding was a strong supporter, and you can see it — Halton Regional Police is something like 18 per cent women. That's a long way from the 50 per cent it should be, but it's probably higher than any other police agency."

How aggressively will Halton Regional Police try and attract females and minorities?

"We are not about to hire target group members who don't meet the standards we have set for police officers of this province. But we are going to aggressively try and increase the target group members who come to our doors, to increase the number of applicants so the pool from which we are selecting is greater."

Chief Campbell came to Halton after leaving the Ontario Provincial Police, with whom he built up an impressive resume. He rose steadily through the ranks, achieving the position of deputy commissioner of field operations, directing 16 OPP districts with 180 officers.

He oversaw the implementation of community policing throughout the OPP and helped set up stand-alone police agencies at the Six Nations

Reserve, and Akwesasne First Nations Territories. He's also managed computer and telecommunications functions and worked in training and planning roles.

Chief Campbell lives with wife Elizabeth and their family in Oakville. They've volunteered with the Canadian Cancer Society, minor league sports, and with Bereaved Families of Ontario, where he was a member of the board of directors.

Since assuming the role at the start of this year, he has been meeting the officers and civilians who make up the local police service, and so far he likes what he sees.

"I'm finding it very stimulating and invigorating. The people in the Halton Regional Police have been exceptionally warm and welcoming."

Modesty is apparently one of the chief's best qualities. Asked about his hobbies and interests, he said, "I love to golf, but I'm lousy. My handicap? It's so bad it's not fit for print."

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