

Six Nations police officers display their new uniforms for the first time Monday.

'Our people know who we are now'

By Peter Fitzpatrick, Expositor Staff

OHSWEKEN — Most were content to ogle from a distance, but one member of the crowd in Veterans Park couldn't keep his paws off the new Six Nations police uniforms.

"Ah, get down, Magic," cried Const. Richard Johnson, pushing aside a tawny boxer dog which had leapt up, happy to see his master in sleek black and grey.

The constable brushed the paw prints off his pants and smiled.

"They fit better . . . I like them because they're different."

Const. Richardson was one of eight officers to attend Monday's first public viewing of new uniforms.

The officers have traded their traditional blue uniforms for new outfits that feature a dark grey shirt with black trim, black pants with grey stripe, and a Stetson hat.

Const. Dave Whitlow said he is excited by the new look.

"I think they're pretty impressive — they're different anyway. They make us stand out a little differently from other police."

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About 120 people gathered at the park to listen to politicians and police officers laud the advancement of community policing on the reserve. Among the speakers was Ontario Solicitor General Mike Farnan, who promised to increase the level of self-policing by native communities in the province.

"It is important that policing services

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be responsive to the needs of the communities they serve. If this is to happen, communities must have a strong say in how they are policed," he said.

"For first nations communities this can happen only when first nations people are members of that police service."

Chief Councillor Bill Montour said introduction of the new uniforms is a symbolic, but important, step in the evolution of a native-controlled justice system.

"Having our own police force has been a big factor in the community, and people are beginning to accept the policing that's being done by the guys from the community," he said prior to the ceremony.

"I think taking them out of the predom-

inantly blue uniform of the OPP is going to enhance that. They're going to have a look that is Six Nations' own police."

The chief councillor said the next step in developing a native justice system will be installing a justice of the peace on the reserve, something he hopes will happen within a year.

Eventually, a full court will operate on the reserve.

Police Chief Glenn Lickers said he likes the new uniforms because they are distinct.

"One of the problems we've had in the last five years is to get people to realize we're not the OPP," he said.

"Our people know who we are now. In a sense, it's a statement that goes beyond our own territory. We're a stand-alone police force."

The uniforms were chosen with a consensus of all 12 officers, said the police chief. Some are self-conscious about the stetsons, though, so officers will continue to wear baseball caps and only don the broad-brimmed hats for special occasions.