

YORK'S CHIEFS



Bruce Crawford 71-86



Donald Hillock 86-92



Bryan Cousineau 92-97



Peter Scott 97-98



Julian Fantno 98-2000



Robert Middaugh 2000-03



Armand La Barge 2003-

Lessons learned from Jessop case

York's missing person investigation chastised

BY PATRICK MANGION
Staff Writer

You have to learn to walk before you can run.

That encapsulates how York Region's police force endured growing pains since its birth in 1971.

It wasn't until the mid-1980s that specialized units such as homicide, an emergency response team, intelligence, forensics and a hold-up squad developed.

Before special squads were developed, York's detectives would work on everything from auto theft to homicide.

Specializing, in the way big city departments had, was not part of York's make-up at time.

The vulnerability of York Region's police force was highlighted in 1996 during former Quebec judge Fred Kaufman's inquiry into the wrongful conviction of Guy Paul Morin, a Queensville resident.

Calling the force's investigation into the 1984 disappearance of Christine Jessop "flawed", Mr. Kaufman said York police failed on a number of levels.

He found that the case was so poorly organized, it never allowed investigators to see the "larger picture".

"This resulted in missed opportunities, an inadequate investigation, at times, of potentially significant leads, and a failure to document important information," Mr. Kaufman said at the time.

Supt. Randy Horne, who had been a cop for six years when the Jessop case broke, said lessons were learned from force's failings during the case.

Although scathing in its criticism, the findings from the Kaufman commission helped raise professional standards, Supt. Horne said.



GUY PAUL MORIN: York investigation contributed to Queensville man's wrongful conviction.

"In the past, we put together the best resources we could. (Officers) did the best they could with what they knew," Supt. Horne said.

"Having a consistent service across the region, has always been our goal."

Chief Armand La Barge, a staff inspector in the mid-'80s, said fallout from the Jessop case raised public expectations.

"The public wanted a sense of satisfaction that this police service was capable of handling any type of incident it faced," Chief La Barge said.

"We were seen as a major police service, we're one of the largest in Ontario and, as a result we were expected to have that level of sophistication as opposed to going to the OPP."

While Mr. Kaufman criticized the force's actions of 1984, when he filed his 1,400-page report in 1996, he was satisfied a similar scenario likely wouldn't have been duplicated under York's more modernized force.

— with files from Rick Vanderlinde

Audit's impact still felt today

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complained of by the police union and its tenacious bulldog of a leader, Paul Bailey.

That audit, which has helped the force rise above the Cousineau years, found the department was "under-staffed, underfunded and under-equipped".

Three provincial auditors said the police force for Canada's fastest growing municipality was so poorly equipped, it was lacking in every investigative unit, including homicide, robbery, surveillance and child abuse.

The auditors were quick to point out the shortcomings "were not a reflection of the officers."

"Rather, it is a result of insufficient resources".

It was questionable leadership by Mr. Cousineau, combined with a frugal police board and regional council led by former chairperson Eldred King, that allowed the force to fall behind the times.

The eye-opening provincial audit made 65 recommendations aimed at modernizing the force in several areas, including management.

Perhaps the most positive outcome to the Cousineau era was how seriously the police services board and new interim chief, Peter Scott, took the auditor's recommendations, especially since there was no legally binding reason for them to do anything.

The force had ignored

provincial audits before.

In 1993, York Region's police services board shelved an auditor's report recommending several changes in the force's communication branch.

The bottom line: they thought it was too expensive.

But it was a different story by 1997.

'Lessons have been learned from an acrimonious period that still stings the memories of some.'

At the time, police services board member Bob Callow said the same provincial auditors who found deficiencies in the force applauded the board's quick reaction.

"They say it's one of the best examples of the task of implementation that they've seen," Mr. Callow said.

When Chief Julian Fantno took over in June 1998, the audit had become the backbone of the force's new motto — "The Benchmark of Excellence".

Today, Chief Armand La Barge and his senior officers are guided by long-term strategic plans that were lacking before the audit's recommendations.

For the force and York Region's residents, lessons have been learned from an acrimonious period that still stings the memories of some.

Violent crimes anomalies, chief says

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alarm call.

Instead, a chain of events followed that would re-shape policing in York Region and the public's sense of how safe their residential communities really were.

As the dreaded 'officer down' call crackled across police radios, Chief La Barge later learned it was his friend and fellow officer who had been shot on a seemingly harmless alarm call at a Markham company.

He recalls a collective angst washing

over the small and close-knit force as news broke of the department's first officer fatality.

But, despite their impact, the crimes were still anomalies, Chief La Barge added.

While sensational crimes garner headlines, they aren't always representative, nor a reflective of the state of public safety in York Region, he said.

"We're not blaming the media. The reality is that we've put information out, the media pick up on, on an arrest or homicide... but some people take that to mean that it's less safe in society than it was in years past," he said.

THE STATE OF PUBLIC SAFETY

April 28: Where we are:

Staff writer Martin Derbyshire examined the realities and perceptions of public safety in York Region in 2005, discovering while crime rates are relatively stable, violent crimes and weapons are taking their toll on the public psyche. Link: www.yorkregion.com/yr/newscentre/special-feature/Public_Safety/story/2744671p-3176984c.html

Today: Where we were:

Staff writer Pat Mangion looks back about 20 years, focusing on 1984 the year York Region lost its innocence with the murders of nine-year-old Christine Jessop and two York Regional Police officers. As well, editor Rick Vanderlinde looks at the impact of a provincial audit that led to the downfall of former chief Bryan Cousineau.

Next Thursday: Where we're going:

Mr. Derbyshire finishes the series with a prediction of public safety in the future, looking at community policing, technology and the type of crime that may become more prevalent.

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