

PEOPLE: Mike Burns

HE'S GOT THE BEAT

Police officer gets his kicks in Stouffville music scene

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Mike Burns has spent more than a quarter century with York Regional Police but he almost never joined the force.

Growing up, all Mr. Burns wanted to be was a police officer. So on his 21st birthday, the age of eligibility for people to apply to the Ontario Provincial Police, Mr. Burns went to Toronto's OPP headquarters and filled out an application.

He made it through to the interview process and one of the questions the recruiting officers asked him was where would he like to work.

"Being a little savvy to their ways, I said I'd like to work somewhere in Northern Ontario," Mr. Burns recalled like it was yesterday, not 33 years ago. "They said: 'Northern Ontario, well all of our recruits go to Northern Ontario, so that's good. Where in particular in Northern Ontario would you like to go?' I said Barrie, Orillia. 'There's the door Mr. Burns, thank you for coming out.'"

He is also the co-host of Open Mic with John and Mike, which is a regular open jam session at The Earl of Whitchurch pub on Main Street.

Over the next five years, Mr. Burns continued working as a truck driver, got married and bought a home in Stouffville.

"I didn't get in and became very dejected," he said. But his wife at the time knew of his dream, so when she saw an ad in this newspaper seeking recruits for York Region's department, she convinced him to apply.

"I said if the OPP wouldn't hire me (why would they?). She said, get up there and apply. I applied. Next thing you know, I was on the job,"

he said.

Over the next 28 years, Mr. Burns worked in a variety of capacities within the department, including uniform patrol officer, coach officer, breathalyzer technician and platoon training officer.

He became a commercial crime investigator in 1989 and was promoted to the rank of detective in 1995. Mr. Burns' comfortable presence in front of an audience also made him popular at fraud and counterfeit detection conferences. He was transferred in 1997 to the training bureau as the sergeant in charge of academic training.

Mr. Burns moved from training to the intelligence bureau in 2003 and worked in the organized crime section. Mr. Burns was promoted again in 2006 to the rank of staff sergeant and moved into the community mobilization bureau. For the next four years Mr. Burns worked beside many local youth through a variety of programs.

He is now back in the intelligence bureau as the detective sergeant in charge of covert operations.

"I think early on in my career I kind of set somewhat of a goal and that was to have the opportunity to experience a broad variety of things within York Regional Police. ... Looking back on my career, I've really achieved that," he said.

Although Mr. Burns is eligible to retire in 2012, he doesn't plan on it.

"I suspect I would stick around ... because I'm having fun," he said.

Although Mr. Burns has had an extensive career in the police force, people may actually know him more for his singing.

Mr. Burns is a regular performer in and around Whitchurch-Stouffville. He is also the co-host of Open Mic with John and Mike, which is a regular open jam session at The Earl of Whitchurch pub on Main Street.

"He's a real go-getter, as far as that goes," said John McGouran. "I just basically show up and perform. He makes it easy for me, although I do lug all the equipment."



SUN-TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

York Regional Police Det. Sgt. Mike Burns has played at several venues in Stouffville, after making his public debut at an open mic event 10 years ago. In his day job, he works in the covert operations branch.

Mr. Burns and Mr. McGouran met a few years back when they were both regular performers at the now-defunct Crossroads.

Their music, along with their careers – Mr. McGouran is a fire-fighter – made for a natural friendship.

Mr. Burns, however, has one fault, according to Mr. McGouran – he loves reality shows.

"He can't be all good," Mr. McGouran laughed.

It was during an open mic jam about 10 years that Mr. Burns, a campfire guitarist and singer, made his performance debut.

"I was originally intimidated, just because to me, they were pros," Mr. Burns said of his fellow performers.

Encouragement from the show's host, Pierre Bordeleau, kept Mr. Burns coming out and performing.

"One day I played again, I don't know how long ago, Pierre Bordeleau was standing there. I'll never forget it, after I finished performing my song, he looked at me and said: 'This is ridiculous, you really should be doing this for a living.'"

"I went 'oh wow' and I don't know

whether that was true or whether he was blowing sunshine up my butt, but it encouraged me to continue to pursue it."

However, he has no aspirations of becoming famous.

"I'm 54 years old. I do this for fun," he said. "Maybe that's why I don't write music. I don't see that in me. ... It's fun for me and when it stops being fun for me I probably won't do it anymore."

Mr. Burns' knowledge of the local music scene has led him to co-hosting a new program on WhiStle Radio called Nite Out, which features local artists and where they are playing around town. The show airs Thursdays at 7 p.m. and again on Fridays at 6 p.m.

"There didn't seem to be a central place that we could get the message that this band was playing here, this band was playing there," Mr. Burns said of why he pitched the idea to producer and co-host Tara Donaghey.

Is there a music scene in Stouffville?

You bet and "it's very healthy," according to Mr. Burns. "Stouffville

is blessed with a huge amount of local talent to suit all tastes."

If music and the police force weren't enough to keep Mr. Burns busy, there was a time when he spent quite a number of years behind the bench as a minor hockey and softball coach.

"I tend to go into things and I give my full commitment, try to be full of energy," he said.

But after years of working his way up the ranks from house league coach to Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey director, he stepped away.

"I sort of became a little burned out coaching," he said.

But Mr. Burns hasn't abandoned sports all together. He and his current wife, Nela, operate Twilight Run Farm in Uxbridge and raise race-bred American quarter horses and board retired race horses.

"I love it, I really love it. That's her passion. My passion is music. That's sort of the balance," he said. "I'd like to say it's an equal partnership, but she does about 90 per cent of the work for the horses. She's brilliant when it comes to horses."

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