

# FAREWELL TO THE CHIEF



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Armand La Barge retired Monday from the York Regional Police, after 37 years with the force, the last eight as chief.

## Partnerships La Barge's legacy

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Former York Regional Police chief Armand La Barge wants his legacy to be punctuated by the community partnerships he helped build.

Mr. La Barge, 56, capped off 37 years in policing and eight as York's top cop Monday with the swearing in of new Chief Eric Jolliffe.

"I had kind of gone through an examination of what I had done and what I had to do and I came to the realization that a lot of what I had wanted to do has been done," Mr. La Barge said.

He's a man described by colleagues as having inspired them to be as dedicated to their job as he is.

And he admits he had some help along the way.

He considers former York police chief Don Hillock a mentor.

Mr. La Barge wanted to leave while he was still young enough to do other things. Not leaving too soon, but also not overstaying his welcome. He plans to continue his graduate studies next year.

He already has a bachelor of arts honours degree, a multiculturalism studies certificate from York University and a master's degree from Trent University in Canadian and native studies.

"It's a good time for a new chief to start," he said.

He said he will miss the job, his policing colleagues and the community, but knows there is life beyond policing.

He has visited Jamaica, Morocco, South Korea and Poland, where he took part in aid work and plans to continue doing more.

"I'm very passionate about that. I find it richly fulfilling."

And, while he is not considering run-

ning for elected office now, he is "fascinated" by national politics.

"If an appointment came up, I would seriously consider it, if I thought it was something I could assist with making this a better country or a better world," he said.

York police has raised its public profile, Mr. La Barge said. A greater emphasis has been placed on police visibility in the community as a result of the force and the police board working together, he said.

Meeting the expectations of the public can also prove challenging, he noted.

Policing in such a diverse community has been an opportunity, he said, adding it's important for officers to gain an understanding of the region's various cultures.

## Memories of a chief

“Many years ago, when Armand was head of intelligence and security, I came under threat by a neo-Nazi organization. Armand met with me immediately to ensure my family felt safe. He assigned a car to watch my home during the crisis. Late one evening, I heard a loud rap on my door. It was cold and rainy. Standing there was Armand La Barge.

“Bernie,” he said, “I was in the neighbourhood so I decided to do a check on how you’re doing. Two things: One, never open the door to anyone before checking who it is. Two, you forgot to lock your back door.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”

Thank you Chief La Barge – Armand – for the trail you have forged, for your passion and your commitment to policing and to community and for the respect that you have shown, through words and deeds, to the people you serve and to the people you lead.”

Bernie Farber, CEO Canadian Jewish Congress, social activist.

“On Feb. 6, 2002, less than two months after Chief La Barge was sworn in, the York Regional Police, in partnership with the Markham African Caribbean Association, hosted its first citizenship court in York Region. At this event, 100 new Canadians were welcomed to Canada. This was an impressive start. It shed light on what we believed to be the chief's core values and it paved the way for his distinguished tenure as chief of police in York Region.

The diversity in our police force is a true representation of York Region. Children from all cultural groups have role models in the York Regional Police force whom they can emulate.

Chief La Barge is an individual with tremendous skills, cultural sensitivity and a prime architect and supporter for cultural diversity not only in his institution but across the region and beyond.”

Pat Howell, vice-president  
Markham African Caribbean Association

“I have worked for and with Armand over the last almost 29 years and I have come to know him as a true professional who has always been guided by what is right.

His personal integrity has resulted in an organization whose members strive to serve with the same dedication.

I have travelled with him to Jamaica, to our adopted orphanage, on a couple of occasions and got to know him on a personal level as an individual who truly cares about others and their well-being.

I have come to know him as a visionary and mentor, sincere and compassionate in his perseverance as a champion for diversity and inclusion, an ardent defender of social justice and human rights, a dynamic police leader and, above all, a true humanitarian in every sense of the word.”

Chief Eric Jolliffe, York Regional Police