

# Policing to mirror rapidly changing region

BY JOE FANTAUZZI  
jfantauzzi@yrmg.com

In the shadow of a 50-storey condominium tower, the officer feels the voice-activated mobile computer on his wrist vibrate.

He has been sent on a bike to canvass residents in the south York Region neighbourhood about break-and-enters the past few days.

Pulling off to the side of a bike path, the addresses of break-and-enter complainants, with whom he has been assigned to speak, are highlighted on a tiny computer screen.

It's hot and humid, but he's comfortable in a breathable uniform made specifically for his bicycle unit. On his belt hangs a gun and an immobilization device, which uses electric current, that fits between his index finger and thumb.

Familiar with the neighbourhood, the officer knows he will put his second and even his third language to use today.

It's believed the perpetrator made his escape from the neighbourhood via the subway.

And while the above scenario is only a projection, interviews with police experts monitoring future trends suggest the officer of 2051 will police a region of 1.8 million people — a very different region than the one formed 40 years ago in 1971, which had a population of 169,000.

But police today believe the fundamentals of policing will remain the same: face-to-face communication with residents; and maintaining public safety.

In the days leading up to the formation of York Region, Jan. 1, 1971, patrol sergeant Glenn "Hawkeye" Phillips was stationed with the Newmarket police department.

In those days, officers would keep an eye on four red lights around town as they patrolled. The lights would flash if an officer was needed after midnight because the dispatcher had gone home for the night, said the former officer, now 81, and retired from policing since 1988.

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It was a much simpler time, he said. "We all worked together, we all went out together," Mr. Phillips recalled.

When the regional force came together, several events needed to take place to ensure a smooth transition, according to the book *The History of Policing in York Region*, written by Const. Carol Sokil and published in 1991, the force's 20th anniversary year.

Some feared job downsizing would follow the creation of a regional force and there were issues about equalizing salaries and ironing out the ranks — which would prove unpopular with some.

Heading it all was Bruce Crawford, a former Navy officer.

And it likely wasn't an easy go. Many police cars were in varying states of disrepair and the communication system was a patchwork, former York chief Armand La Barge said. As a young officer, he was stationed in the same Newmarket police build-

ing as Mr. Crawford from 1973 to 1979.

Police offices in Woodbridge, Markham, Stouffville and Sutton were closed.

But it worked out for Mr. Phillips, who enjoyed a salary increase following the changes.

And, while he says there was no confusion in the early days, amalgamation was a "helluva big change" from working on a small-town force.

Most people don't remember York's bright yellow police cars, he recalled.

"When we got them, it was a scream," Mr. Phillips said. "You know what (people) thought... They thought we were taxis."

It was eight years later, in 1980, that Brad Bulmer would pull on a York police uniform.

Today, commander of York's traffic bureau, Staff Sgt. Bulmer remembers Mr. Crawford's focus on traffic safety — specifically speed enforcement.

York was going through a "brutal" period on the streets and saw 37 fatal crashes in 1988. Bloomington Road was particularly problematic, he added.

But there was very little public education being done, he said.

It was also more of a "one-more-for-the-road" society than today, he said, adding softer penalties may have fuelled driving behaviour. But that began to change in the late 1980s and early 1990s when police began doing information blitzes and stepping up spotchecks.

He expects officers will eventually get away from keyboards as better, more mobile technology becomes available.

However, technology already exists that tells officers if air bags deployed during a crash and if a seat belt was buckled, both

of which will play a larger role in collision investigation.

But, no matter how portable or fast traffic technology has become, one thing has not changed: going to the home of a collision victim, knocking on the door and informing the family.

"You still have to go face-to-face and deliver that message," Staff Sgt. Bulmer said.

Chief Eric Jolliffe agrees the force will continue to evolve.

A native of Thornhill in the 1950s, Chief Jolliffe admitted he never expected the region to change as much as it has.

"I have seen tremendous change in this region for the better," he said.

But the road during the past 40 years hasn't been without potholes.

From 1992 to 1998, the force "did not grow an inch" to match the community, the chief said.

"We lost a lot of ground as a police service," he said.

That era coincided with a dark period for York police and culminated with the resignation of former chief Bryan Cousineau in 1998 over breach of trust allegations related to an interest-free loan.

A year earlier, in 1997, provincial government auditors referred to York police as poorly run and pointed out problems in almost every area of the service.

Since then, York police have gone on a massive hiring blitz and modernized its technology.

Statistics consistently rank York Region as one of the safest communities in the country.

Looking ahead, York police are building a strategy to serve seniors, a group that is expected to comprise 20 per cent of the population in the next 20 years, Chief Jolliffe said.

As the region's geography and density change leading up to 2051, it will be important for police to adapt.



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