

Force of change: 300 senior YRP officers could retire by 2020

At least one senior officer feels the job has changed over the years

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It wasn't long before his 30 years in policing were up that York police Sgt. Rob Cullen began thinking about retirement.

With his full pension eligibility in place, Cullen could have stayed on, but as the years have progressed he's felt the increased constraints at work take their toll.

"There's a lot more oversight and with that comes pressure and stress," said the 52-year-old, noting the certain people's increasing ambivalence towards police is also weighing on his decision.

He now works in a "run-of-the-mill" part-time job.

"It's a nice little change and gives

you a different outlook on life," the Georgina resident said.

Cullen is likely not the only senior officer in York police ranks considering retirement at this early stage in their policing careers - in fact between now and 2020 some 300 officers are up for a pension and full retirement.

The increased numbers are part of a "baby boom" of police officers in York Region and around the GTA experienced in the lead up to the 1990s, when services hired hundreds of officers to keep up with increased population numbers around southern Ontario.

Although it's now common to witness York police hire around 30 new officers a year, between 1985 and 1989 some 75 officers were hired annually.

Now many of those cops will be contemplating their exits.

Cullen said when he started he remembers officers using the num-

THINNED BLUE LINES?

York Regional Police has seen a rise in retirements. The average number of retirees over past five years is 17; 23 are anticipated this year.

"We do recognize that every retirement of a member with 30-plus years is a great loss of experience, knowledge and corporate memory," said Chief Eric Jolliffe. "However, we have processes in place to ensure our officers are building competence and experience to fill the roles vacated."

ber 32-1/2 years as a barometer for a good retirement age.

"A lot of guys would stay past that, 35 years, some even 40," he added. "But everyone I talk to these days keeps telling me the same thing, 'I'm doing my 30 and I'm out.'"

Depending on the size of the exodus, York police could not only lose a high percentage of its senior

ranks, but also the countless years of corresponding police experience, which can be vital to training new investigators and breaking both the small and larger scale probes police engage with daily.

"We've got a lot of super talented people, homicide, drugs, sex assault, child exploitation, collision reconstruction, but it takes a long time to get there," said Cullen. "If it goes by the wayside, maybe it takes a few years, maybe we never get it back."

The York Regional Police Association has been tracking the numbers and wants assurances the service and the province will have new officers trained and experienced officers ready to replace the senior positions being vacated.

With around 1,400 uniformed officers including 39 senior officers, union president Todd Sepkowski said York police is not big enough to lose 50 to 60 officers per year.

"There should be a plan in place, we need to play chess here, not checkers," he said. "It takes 18 months to hire and train up an officer so they can be out on the road alone. A large portion of your experience might be walking out the door in the next three years."

And although police agree they could lose 51 officers on average per year until 2020, there are currently plans to hire about 180 new officers over the next four years.

Not everyone sees the retirements as a bad thing; some see it as an opportunity.

Former Toronto mayor John Sewell said Toronto police will save \$100 million over the next three years by allowing 200 officers to retire without replacing them.

As for any detriment in relation to solving crimes, Sewell said younger police officers will be better trained and help do away with "old-style policing".

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