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**RECRUITING
RETENTION
RETIREMENT
OPTIONS AND
OPPORTUNITY
AT EVERY STAGE**

**DON'T SETTLE FOR NO
INDIGENOUS OFFICER INSPIRES
YOUNG RECRUITS P. 8**

**EMERGENCY
RESPONSE TEAMS
CHANGES OPEN DOORS TO
SPECIALIZED ROLE P. 12**

**RCMP RESERVE
COMMUNITY POLICING AFTER
RETIREMENT P. 16**

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COVER SECTION

- 7 RCMP recruiters seek to build diverse force
- 8 Q&A: Indigenous officer inspires young recruits
- 9 Panel discussion: What's the best way to retain employees?
- 12 Changes open doors to emergency response teams
- 13 Bringing mental-health support to a remote detachment
- 14 New hope for officers with monocular vision
- 15 Guidebook helps officers get ready to retire
- 16 RCMP Reserve Program offers employment after retirement



DEPARTMENTS

- 4 Editorial message
- 5 News Notes
- 17 Just the Facts: The National DNA Data Bank
- 18 Detachment profile: Officers have varied work in Beaver Creek, Yukon
- 19 Training: Emergency response teams train to be ready, safe
- 20 Ask an Expert: Divers bring closure to families of drowning victims
- 22 Last Page: Journey comes full circle for keen cadet



ON THE COVER:

No matter what stage of career RCMP recruits and officers find themselves in, there are opportunities to achieve success and fulfilment.

Photo: Serge Gouin, RCMP





A CAREER OF YOUR MAKING



Depending on where you live, spring is a time that gets us thinking about new possibilities. For many, it's a natural time to renew, refocus and plan ahead.

This issue of *Gazette* magazine applies that thinking to how the RCMP strives to recruit new people, retain the best talent and, as careers progress, help employees plan for retirement.

Our cover story and our Q&A feature the work of some of the RCMP's recruiters who not only share their practical knowledge with prospective cadets but are models of inspiration in their own right.

Aside from seeking recruits who are the best fit for the RCMP, they offer a personal approach that can make the difference in a competitive world.

Once here, what factors impact an employee's decision to stay or go elsewhere? Four employees tackle this question in our panel discussion.

From recognition to career development, there's a way for all of us to positively affect the workplace, our colleagues and the people we supervise. While the panel responses are all different, there are a few key areas of consensus that managers in particular might find enlightening.

For many, the decision to work at the RCMP is all about opportunities.

Patricia Vasylychuk writes about changes to the RCMP's Emergency Response Team program. The physical standards, the selection process and the course are now more representative of the job, and have opened up new possibilities for male and female officers with an interest in this challenging role.

Support is another common-sense approach to keeping employees healthy and able to fully contribute.

Paul Northcott describes a northern program that helps employees in the remote detachment of Fort Smith, N.W.T., take care of their mental-health. The program flew in a psychologist to visit with the detachment and provide mental-health strategies and individual counselling that aren't otherwise available in the community.

Support goes beyond day-to-day challenges. Vasylychuk looks at the inspiring story of an officer whose partial vision loss could have put an end to his operational career. Read how Cst. Michael Jaszczyszyn trained relentlessly to adapt his vision to meet the current standards, and paved the way for others with monocular vision to get a second chance at active duty.

Thinking about retirement? Good. There's much to look forward to after a successful career. But S/Sgt. Doug Wasylenki talks about the development of a retirement guide for fellow officers in Alberta to take some of the mystery out of planning.

And for officers who aren't quite ready to hang up their police hats, read Travis Poland's story on the RCMP Reserve Program. There are plenty of opportunities to serve as a Reserve in communities across Canada, including the North.

We close our issue with the timeline of a cadet whose journey to join the RCMP came full circle when she herself became an informal recruiter.

It's a role that each and every employee can take on. ■

— Katherine Aldred

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COMMUNITY HEALING CAMP ADDRESSES ADDICTION

RCMP



RCMP Sgt. George Whelan organized a healing camp to address addictions in his community. He wore his uniform during the camp to show that officers can provide support on top of enforcement.

By Travis Poland

God's Lake Narrows, a Manitoba fly-in community, is stronger following a healing camp targeting addictions and social issues.

RCMP Sgt. George Whelan, who worked in God's Lake Narrows until December, helped organize the camp and says it was "an empowering, uplifting and supportive environment."

Whelan says since the camp, there have been fewer calls to police and families have had their children returned from social services.

The success is attributed to the support

system the camp developed in the community.

"When people go out of town for treatment they don't always have support when they return," says Alice Captain, a supervisor with the God's Lake Narrows Awasis Agency, a family services organization. "If they do treatment in the community, the support is here."

The participants applied what they learned in the community and volunteered at the next camp.

"We started with six participants, and after the second camp there were 12 people and the support grows," says Whelan.

Several guest speakers attended the

camp touching on topics like domestic abuse and child welfare.

Participants could discuss their experience with addiction and withdrawals, which allowed them to understand and support one another.

Whelan wore his RCMP uniform during his three-day stay to expand the community's view of the RCMP and strengthen the relationship with the community.

"We're often seen in an enforcing role and I wanted to be seen in a supportive role in the uniform," Whelan says.

"This showed people they can see the police differently," adds Captain.

The camp involved activities such as fishing for walleye and northern pike, and collecting traditional medicines like wild mint and lavender leaf.

Whelan says the camp resonates with community members and their way of life.

"This is a grassroots initiative that has people connecting with their cultures and traditions," says Whelan.

"It takes people back to their roots and promotes healing from the land," Captain says.

The program continues with monthly meetings and the camp will resume with warmer weather. Whelan says the program's ongoing nature shows it's a success and it would be positive in other communities. ■

WORKPLACE SWEAT LODGE A PLACE FOR CALM REFLECTION

By Travis Poland

A sweat lodge built at the RCMP's headquarters in Halifax, N.S., last fall is providing employees a place for thought and contemplation.

RCMP Cpl. De-Anne Sack, a driving force behind the project, says she's proud of the RCMP for supporting the initiative.

Sack, an Indigenous policing analyst in Nova Scotia who has been with the RCMP for 22 years, began facilitating sweat lodge ceremonies at an RCMP training facility five years ago. The events became popular and Sack wanted to offer the ceremony to more employees.

She brought the idea for a headquarters sweat lodge to management who supported

the proposal. Now, Sack hosts a sweat lodge ceremony on the last Thursday of every month.

Sack says the headquarters location gives RCMP members, civilian members and public service employees the chance to participate in a ceremony and non-Indigenous employees have embraced the opportunity.

"They're doing their part towards reconciliation," Sack says, adding she's pleased non-Indigenous employees are participating.

White Eagle Sundance Chief William Nevin, who spoke at the sweat lodge opening in October, says the ceremonies allow one to calm down and reflect on emotions, adding that Indigenous people have used sweat lodges for centuries.

Nevin says the sweat lodge will help promote understanding and build relationships between the RCMP and local Indigenous communities.

"The more people understand, the more they can relate to problems," says Nevin.

Sweat lodges are used by Indigenous communities across North America as ceremonial and healing spaces. The dome-shaped lodge at the RCMP's Halifax headquarters is built of birch bark, bent birch logs and wool blankets.

The RCMP isn't the only Canadian institution to install a sweat lodge. In 2010, a sweat lodge opened at CFB Edmonton built by local Indigenous elders and the military with help from the RCMP. ■



SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS TARGET TRAFFIC TROUBLES

By Travis Poland

Manitoba RCMP are using new media to tackle an old problem — traffic violations.

A call for tips was placed on social media last fall to address traffic trouble hot spots in a campaign called #rcmpHOTSPOT.

The public was encouraged to send traffic tips to the RCMP using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

The initiative aimed at engaging with the public to find out where they would like to see more RCMP officers on the road, says Letisha Sherry, a social media specialist with Manitoba RCMP.

“We wanted to show our followers we listen,” she says.

During the two-day campaign, #rcmpHOTSPOT posts garnered more than 1,200 comments.

RCMP Cpl. Brock Carson, with the Headingley Traffic Service, says the tips helped officers pinpoint times and locations where drivers are breaking laws.

“The repeated zones, the places people are talking about, those became our priority zones,” Carson says.

Many messages pointed to areas that the RCMP know are prone to troubled traffic, confirming police resources are used effectively, Carson says.

Tips from the campaign resulted in nearly 150 tickets but Carson says the campaign’s purpose was to reduce high-risk driving behaviours, making roads safer.

Sherry says the campaign aimed to get people who wouldn’t normally call a detachment to engage with the RCMP — especially younger people.

“It’s easier for some to leave a com-

ment or send a message on Facebook,” says Sherry. “They have information that can make our policing better.”

To show the RCMP listened to the comments, traffic officers went to suggested locations and replied with social media posts and photos.

Multiple tweets by the public said illegal passing on the right was common on Winnipeg’s Perimeter Highway.

A traffic officer went to Perimeter Highway the next day and caught a vehicle passing in the right-hand shoulder — a fine of more than \$200.

Sherry says this campaign can help the RCMP gain social media followers meaning more people will see RCMP news and calls for assistance.

“It’s important especially when we have a missing person or an amber alert or a wanted individual.” ■

ROCK SHOW HITS HOME

By Patricia Vasylchuk

The 550 teenagers filing into the auditorium of a school in Dawson Creek, B.C., are glassy-eyed and skeptical. Even when the curtain opens on Love Bomb, a gritty modern musical about how anyone can become a victim of human trafficking, they’re expecting the usual.

But when an actor suddenly drops the F-bomb, the crowd erupts in surprise. Just as suddenly, they go silent when the next line is delivered. And like that, they’re hooked.

It happens all the time, according to RCMP Cpl. Sue Harvey, a supervisor in the Indigenous Policing Unit in Alberta.

“They’ve heard safe talks before but, with this, they’re actually listening,” says Harvey, who developed the project, coordinating more than 60 shows in schools and communities across British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan since 2016.

The musical, which was written using real-life police cases, is part of a partnership project between the RCMP and Shameless Hussy Productions to raise awareness about the dangers of sex exploitation in Canadian communities.

“Youth love their headphones and music is universal, so it’s a good way to tie in education,” says Sgt. Stephanie Ward, who works in Indigenous Policing with Alberta RCMP.



Martine Chénier/RCMP

The RCMP is using the universal appeal of music in a theatrical rock show to raise awareness about human trafficking and sex exploitation.

Ward says people who’ve seen the performance often say they didn’t think human trafficking and sex exploitation happened in their small communities. But she says these crimes are more common than people think.

The RCMP laid human-trafficking charges in 401 cases between 2005 and 2017, according to the Human Trafficking National Coordination Centre.

“We have young girls and guys, maybe dealing with issues at home, leaving with no self-esteem, craving love and attention. And the pimps use that,” says Ward, referring to the phenomenon that some call love bombing.

“They pose as boyfriends to draw them in — give them stability, gifts, affection. Then they use violence and scare tactics to keep them from leaving.”

After each show, the audience is invited to participate in discussion sessions that give them the chance to ask questions about what they’ve seen. The talks are led by a panel of actors, police officers and partnering agencies who use local statistics to dispel misconceptions about human trafficking. ■

LOOKING FOR TALENT

RCMP RECRUITERS SEEK TO BUILD DIVERSE FORCE

By Paul Northcott

Across Canada, a group of RCMP officers work every day to attract new recruits and ensure the national police force remains vibrant and reflects the people it serves.

The RCMP has firm requirements for new members and is focused on attracting and training officers that mirror Canada's population. Almost eight million people in Canada identify themselves as visible minorities.

"That's why we have a responsibility to make sure the RCMP represents who we are (as a country)," says Cst. Erika Dirsus, who's based in British Columbia and works to attract new RCMP members. "We are Canada's national police force. We should represent what Canada is all about for everyone."

Cst. Omid Nezami, who was born in Afghanistan, is one of dozens of recruiters across the country tasked with trying to fill the staffing needs of the RCMP. He tours southern Alberta regularly visiting schools, community events and career fairs to discuss policing.

"I'm happy to work where I do and I try to explain to everyone I meet that the RCMP is an interesting and fun place to work," he says.

COMPETING FOR THE BEST

But recruiting can be a challenging job.

To fill the ranks, the RCMP has to compete with provincial and municipal police forces. And of course, there's a wide array of other organizations that are trying to attract young people.

"There's a lot of people out there looking for talent. But I just remind people there's so much opportunity with the RCMP," says Nezami, noting the myriad of jobs and postings that are available from coast to coast. "There are so many things you can do and, if you want, you can live anywhere in Canada."

In British Columbia, Dirsus comes across interested candidates who have read media stories about working at the RCMP. Some involve allegations of harassment, others allegations of racism.

"The reports are out there and I can't ignore them," she says. "But I can only talk to them from my own perspective — and harassment can happen in any profession — but the RCMP has taken steps to address and eliminate it. And I hope that eases the mind of people who want to join."

Dirsus also meets with Indigenous youth. She's aware of the RCMP's commitment to achieving reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and that the force is determined to provide support for Indigenous policing.

"Honestly, the concerns (of Indigenous youth) are not unlike any others," she says. "They want a chance to serve their community."

OPPORTUNITIES AROUND

The latter point is not lost on Cst. Imane Gourramen, who works in Brooks, Alta.

Born and raised in Canada, she is the RCMP's first-ever Muslim constable who wears a hijab.

As a general duty officer, Gourramen

says she makes a point of speaking to local residents about choosing a career in the RCMP.

"No one has ever seen anyone like me (as an RCMP police officer)," she says. "I'd like to think I can be a role model and show others that there are opportunities with the RCMP. I'm really happy about that."

She also talks about the importance of the work that RCMP officers have signed up to do.

"I love the community policing aspect of what we do," she says. "I tell people our work is also about respect for who you are and what you do."

For Dirsus — next door in British Columbia — every officer has a responsibility to sell the RCMP.

Officers should never forget why they became police officers in the first place," says Dirsus. "We all need to convey that to people who might be interested in policing. I wouldn't be here in this job after 23 years if I didn't love it, and I want people to know it." ■



RCMP recruiters work to attract talented people from diverse backgrounds who are interested in a policing career.



DON'T SETTLE FOR NO

INDIGENOUS OFFICER INSPIRES YOUNG RECRUITS

Courtesy of Cpl. Bev Pitawanakwat



Cpl. Bev Pitawanakwat uses personal stories to inspire potential Indigenous recruits.

Wanderlust and perseverance led Cpl. Bev Pitawanakwat from an impoverished Indigenous reserve in Northern Ontario to a 10-year career with the military, where she became the first female Navy diver in Canadian history. Patricia Vasylychuk talked to the former marine engineer about why she gave it up to become an Indigenous recruiter for the RCMP.

WHERE DOES YOUR STORY BEGIN?

Growing up, I had no real role models as a young Indigenous person. I thought there was nothing outside of that reserve. I didn't know we had oceans or even the rest of the country. But there was always something in my heart that said, "You're capable of something more."

WHY DID YOU JOIN THE MILITARY?

I was walking by a recruiting centre and I felt compelled to go in. I took an aptitude test and it printed out a bunch of options and one of them was a marine engineer. I didn't have a clue what that was. But within a month, I was in boot camp.

DESCRIBE YOUR MILITARY CAREER.

It opened my eyes to a world I would never have seen otherwise — sailing to countries like Russia, China, Japan, Malaysia, Guam

and the Philippines. But I was part of the transition when women first started working in the military, and we had to work harder to prove ourselves.

HOW DID YOU SUCCEED?

Perseverance. I didn't like being put in a box and I didn't accept being told I couldn't do something.

WHY BECOME A NAVY DIVER?

They were cool as cucumbers, and I thought, I want to be that cucumber! But, I was repeatedly told that I couldn't do it. So, I waited for the chief engineer outside of his room and I said, Chief, please give me a chance to prove myself. And he got me on the course.

WHY DID YOU LEAVE?

I was treated well and was moving up in the ranks, but I wanted to share these amazing experiences, trials and tribulations with Indigenous youth. I thought, "I really have to not think of myself and instead get into these communities and tell these kids that there's no such thing as can't. And that it's OK to be scared."

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

I graduated Depot in 2000, at age 38. And

I said to the staffing people, "You have to send me to your hardest spot and it has to be Indigenous." I think the guy fell out of his chair. Now, I've got nearly 19 years as a proud Mountie and all my service has been working with First Nations communities. I've been an Indigenous recruiter for three years.

WHAT DOES AN INDIGENOUS RECRUITER DO?

I travel extensively to First Nations communities — tournaments, schools, career fairs — sharing my story of tenacity, encouraging our youth and mentoring them to opportunities they might never have considered.

WHAT DO YOU TELL THEM?

That when I was where they are today, the only person that could get me out of the hole was me. I tell them, If you have a dream, believe in that dream; if somebody tells you no, don't settle for that.

HOW DO YOU MENTOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE YOU MEET?

I connect with them over email or my work cell, which they can call any time. I show them how to get themselves ready for the application process. I encourage them to get their driver's licence and do online practice testing. I promote Indigenous programs that build up their self-confidence, and marry them up with a local Indigenous police officer in their community who can mentor them one on one.

Another thing is, I find that some of our Indigenous applicants who live more remotely don't have a good foundation in math and English, which is on the RCMP exam. So, when they're young, I give them the exam and have them write it, and tell them to pay attention to their Grade 12 math and English.

WHAT'S YOUR APPROACH?

I want to make sure we get quality applicants, but I don't want to push them in case they're not suited for that type of work. All I do is open a door; it's up to them if they walk through. I know I've been successful when I see the people that I've sent through the process at Depot. I've had quite a few. ■

RECRUITING TO RETIREMENT

COVER



Employees value the chance to learn and grow. To help retain them, supervisors should provide training opportunities while employees themselves must show they're willing to tackle new assignments.

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO RETAIN EMPLOYEES?

THE PANELLISTS

- **Karine Labranche, manager, RCMP Operational Communication Centre, Westmount, Que.**
- **A/Commr. Jasmin Breton, Commanding Officer Depot Division, Regina, Sask.**
- **Cst. Guillaume Martel, Grande Prairie detachment, Alta.**
- **Julie Gallant, RCMP human resources advisor, Fredericton, N.B.**

When RCMP cadets graduate from Depot, they begin their careers full of energy, hope and optimism. While many continue their careers with this mindset, others lose their enthusiasm and motivation. We asked four RCMP employees for their views on what keeps people satisfied, and how to best help them enjoy long, fulfilling careers.

KARINE LABRANCHE

It's no surprise to anyone that staff retention has become a hot topic at the moment. So what are the best approaches to keep employees motivated? How do we, as an organization, ensure we're able to retain talented, diverse and motivated employees? Good question!

I've been supervising employees in the RCMP Operational Communication Centre (OCC) for a decade and, for me, it's about the people — the person behind the position or the title.

Whether they're an operator in the

OCC, a police officer or an executive assistant, there's one common denominator: they're all human. Employees are the RCMP's greatest asset and the way we treat people is directly linked to performance, motivation, engagement and retention.

Therefore, as managers, we have the ability to affect employee retention every day through our actions.

I was once told by someone who I highly respect that possessing strong "soft skills" was the most important quality as a manager, even more than technical skills or knowledge. These include social and communication skills, specific personality traits and emotional intelligence — traits that, in my opinion, have the power to greatly influence the people around us.

In my experience, it's all about the little things we do. Actions speak louder than words.

Whether it's creating genuine ties with

people and investing in interpersonal relationships (by making ourselves available to listen and being supportive), or contributing to and promoting a positive work environment (by being involved in daily operations and offering feedback and recognition), it's important to show commitment to our employees. Trust me, it all matters. A lot.

We need to assess ourselves continually through introspection, and choose who we want to be, not only as a leader in our respective units but also as an RCMP ambassador. It's hard work but you get it back in loyalty, engagement and productivity. As I said before, leaders have the power to impact people and, in today's world, the stakes are extremely high.

I don't deny that other factors in the workplace contribute to job satisfaction: training and development opportunities, autonomy in our role, the "why" do we do what we do, a sense of making a difference,



clarity of the organization's mandate and mission, and so on.

Also, I'm aware that there are multiple external factors that we have little control over such as salary, benefits and compensation. However, we must invest our best efforts in our immediate sphere of influence.

We've had hard times in the OCC in the past few years, facing a variety of challenges pertaining to recruiting and employee retention, which probably don't differ from other sections. But I can proudly say we've successfully overcome them. We've done it together.

How can we retain our employees?

Just focus on the people.

A/COMMR. JASMIN BRETON

Keeping talented, diverse and motivated employees is critical for the current and continued success of our organization. Retention should be a word that all employees, including supervisors, managers and senior management, can define and clearly understand.

Even though the list of potential contributing factors is very long, I've chosen to identify five that I think we should pay a bit more attention to as we move the organization forward.

The first should be to establish a positive and healthy work environment across the organization, where people feel respected and valued. Our people-first approach in Vision 150 will help us lead the RCMP to continued success. We all have a stake in making and contributing to this environment of trust and respect. It's easy to criticize the organization but I would challenge all employees to be active participants in making the RCMP the organization of choice for current and future employees.

Second, I believe that our employees value the opportunity to learn and to grow within the organization. Supervisors and managers must provide opportunities with a path and level of expectation. Naturally these opportunities must be matched with employees' willingness of to take on additional training and to tackle new and exciting assignments. Our Educational Tuition Reimbursement Program is a great example of a support process that provides our employees the chance to complete educational courses on their own time to further their growth within the force.

A third area of focus should be recogniz-

ing the contributions of our people. In some parts of the organization, we do a great job but many employees value overt and public recognition. Using the formal process, such as the Honours and Recognition Program, is often appreciated but there are many more ways for employees to be recognized. As an organization, we must show each other that we care about the great work we do every day and continuously celebrate our accomplishments in formal and informal settings.

Trust would be the fourth element that contributes to retention. Employees need to feel trusted and managers must recognize the importance of showing their own vulnerability. We need to create an open and honest work environment where everyone takes the time to listen to each other. As someone who grew up playing team sports, I continue to value and appreciate that my supervisor, my peers and my subordinates always have my back.

Finally, employees need to be empowered and given the opportunity to lead. Egos must be left at the door. Everyone should join the organization knowing they have a leadership role within their own work environment. To improve and grow, more focus and energy must be given to leadership development through seminars, courses and practical opportunities.

In our current environment, where the attrition rate is creeping up and recruiting is a challenge, we need to place more attention on retention. The list above is a small sample

of positive steps we are taking — or need to tweak — to make us more attractive to current and future employees.

We all have a role to play in continuing to make the RCMP the organization of choice.

CST. GUILLAUME MARTEL

I graduated from Depot, the RCMP's Training Academy, two years ago. When was asked for my opinion on what keeps me with the force, my gut reaction was that I love my job.

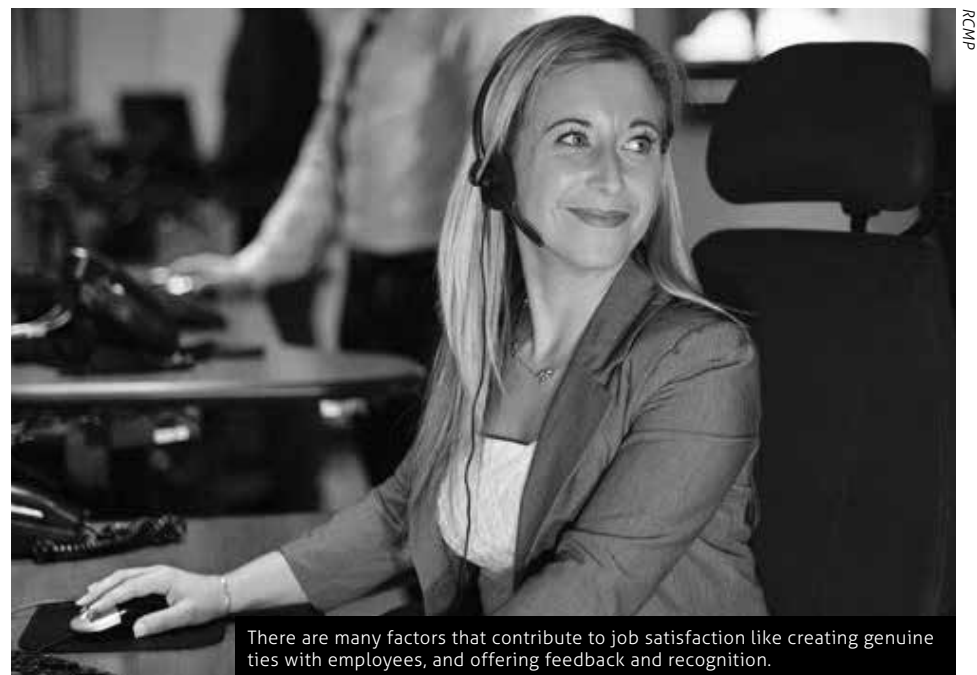
But when I gave it some more thought, I came up with three main reasons why I remain in my job: work environment, training and work schedule.

First, work environment. I've always felt that it's tough to be motivated if you don't like going to work. That's why the right work environment is key for me.

I've been posted to Grande Prairie, Alta., for two years now. I'm 4,000 kilometres away from my family, but I wouldn't trade my work team for anything.

I could go on for hours about how awesome my colleagues and supervisors are. I have an excellent relationship with my co-workers and consider most of them to be friends. And friends are important for me because I'm so far from home. My team is like my second family. I'd say part of the reason I enjoy my job so much is the people I work with.

Training provided by the organiza-



There are many factors that contribute to job satisfaction like creating genuine ties with employees, and offering feedback and recognition.

RCMP



tion is very important. I'm lucky to work in a detachment that offers plenty of training opportunities. Which I much appreciate, because it's a chance to develop new skills and fine-tune existing ones. It helps me be better at my job and provides me with skills that will serve me well throughout my career.

Work schedule is another key component. As a police officer, I work during the day and at night. I work on a four-day rotation, so four on four off. I love it. Granted, we work 12-hour shifts and that can make for some long days, but once I'm done my four days on, I then have four days off to relax, do activities, etc.

In closing, I'd say the best way to retain employees is to listen to their needs. If you aren't happy at work, you will end up leaving eventually. If you're not given the opportunity to improve, to learn new things, to advance, you'll feel useless. And if you can't have a personal life or are unable to balance family and work, you won't stay. So for me, those are the three keys to employee retention.

I must admit that I feel very lucky because these are non-issues for me.

JULIE GALLANT

A quick Google search will provide a flood of advice for employers looking for ways to retain their talent. Work-life balance policies, competitive compensation packages, career progression plans and mentorship

programs, to name only a few. Although there are many ideas that could be explored further, there are two that stand-out as foundational. In general, employees who feel proud of their workplace and who have a strong sense of belonging to their organization, tend to stay longer.

These can be seen as fuzzy concepts that may be difficult to achieve in a tangible sense. However, there are very concrete actions that can be applied and measured towards achieving them, at little cost.

For example, organizations looking to retain talent must first focus on trying to attract employees who are the "right fit" for the organization.

Beyond ensuring that potential employees have the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for the job, employers should look to communicate the organization's culture and core values as part of the recruitment process. This allows both the employer and the potential employee to make an informed decision regarding fit in the workplace.

Communication is key when it comes to retaining existing employees. To feel proud of their work, employees need to know how their work connects to the mission, vision and mandate of the organization. Leaders at all levels must be able to communicate to their staff the value of their work and its link to the bigger picture. These discussions should, at the very least, be part of the organization's cyclical performance management process.

Managers play a critical role in retaining talent and creating a sense of belonging.

First, regular coaching and feedback from their supervisor helps employees feel engaged and valued. Feedback on performance should be ongoing and delivered in a way that encourages an open dialogue on what's needed to achieve the desired level of performance and work objectives.

To make this happen, managers need support from their leaders to make ongoing performance management a priority alongside operational objectives.

Second, managers who take the time to get to know their employees as individuals and make the effort to build a relationship with their team, create an atmosphere where employees feel like they belong and that their contribution matters. Trust and respect are a must within any workplace and managers are responsible for setting the tone within their team.

All of these activities should be part of an organization's normal business practice. Although they are simple ideas, they're critical when trying to retain talent. To make sure an organization doesn't lose sight of these key activities in the face of operational pressures, having concrete measures that can be reported regularly will help keep them at the forefront.

An organization's work towards retaining talent is never done but doing the basics well can certainly set the foundation for success. ■



A supportive work environment and positive relationships with colleagues helps keep employees happy and more likely to stay at their organization.



BREAKING BARRIERS

MORE WOMEN APPLYING TO RCMP EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAMS

By Patricia Vasylchuk

Wearing a nine-kilogram weighted vest, Cst. Amanda Nelles climbed over a 1.8-metre wall during a test of physical and mental endurance for the RCMP's Emergency Response Team (ERT).

Nelles, who works in Winnipegosis, Man., is one of eight women who tried out for ERT last year, causing a spike in the number of female applicants from previous years.

About one female officer and up to 100 male officers apply each year.

The spike might be the result of changes made to the ERT program beginning in 2015, which included the physical standards, the selection process and the course. The purpose of the changes was to identify and address barriers — actual or perceived — that might hold officers back from applying to the program for reasons unrelated to the actual job.

"We were seeing a decrease in applicants across the country, so it was to the program's benefit that we examine the process to increase the appeal for both male and female applicants," says Insp. Adam MacNeill. He was the officer in charge of the National ERT Program at the time of the initial changes.

In 2012, the Canadian Police College surveyed female RCMP officers and interviewed former female ERT trainees. The results showed that the most common barriers to women applying for ERT were the fitness standards, a perceived unwelcoming work environment and work-life balance.

MODERNIZED APPROACH

One major change to the program was the removal of outdated physical standards, which included a 2.5-kilometre run, pull-ups, sit-ups, push-ups and an infamous 65-kilogram bench press.

"They're not really representative of the job function," says MacNeill. "There was a need to modernize the approach and make sure that the activities we were undertaking actually translated to what you'd end up doing as an ERT member."

Physical requirements are now tested

only with the ERT Physical Abilities Requirement Evaluation (PARE). Exercises like the weighted-vest wall climb are job-specific, gender-neutral and backed by science and psychology, he says.

S/Sgt. Val Brooks was the first and only female ERT member in the RCMP, serving on the team from 2004 to 2008. She says a long-standing, male-dominated profession can create an intimidating working environment that could discourage some women from applying.

"I have fond memories of my time on the team," says Brooks. "But I also felt a lot of pressure as a woman. I never wanted to make a mistake because then people would say, 'See, we always said a woman wasn't capable of doing this job.'"

Removing perceptions like that helps ensure there's no discrimination in the selection process and that officers hired are the best for the job, says National ERT Co-ordinator Christian Dupuis.

BALANCING ACT

Brooks says she's seen a shift in the old-boys-club mindset and that today, women are more likely shying away from ERT because of perceived challenges with work-life balance.

"There're definitely women in our organization who are capable but they have other priorities," says Brooks.

Being a member of ERT is a big com-

mitment, admits MacNeill.

Most ERT officers are on part-time teams and must maintain their primary full-time RCMP positions and be ready to respond to ERT calls at a moment's notice. This, combined with the demands of monthly training and the need to maintain an above average fitness level, can be too demanding for some.

But if it's the right fit, the career is worth pursuing if you have a strong support system at home, says Nelles, who participated in one of three pilot selection processes conducted between 2015 and 2018.

"I used to do Olympic weight-lifting before joining the RCMP," says Nelles, "And the more I looked into ERT, the more it fit who I am outside of wanting to be a police officer."

Though she didn't pass the ERT PARE, Nelles says with the right training, she'll be better prepared for the next one.

Chances are she won't be the only one trying again. According to Dupuis, regardless of gender, for every 24 candidates who complete the first phase of the selection process, only six make it to the next step.

"The fact that I was successful in passing the national course shows that women are capable of doing the job," says Brooks. "And now that they've removed all the barriers, the door is wide open." ■



Cst. Andrew MacLellan times Cst. Kristen Carroll during a shooting drill at an Emergency Response Team familiarization session for female officers in Cole Harbour, N.S.

RCMP

RECRUITING TO RETIREMENT
COVER

REMOTE ACCESS

BRINGING MENTAL-HEALTH SUPPORT TO EMPLOYEES

By Paul Northcott

For police and other first responders who struggle with mental illnesses, making the decision to get treatment can be tough.

Step one is asking for help. But when that assistance is hundreds of kilometres away, taking the next step to seek support can sometimes seem futile.

That's one reason why Sgt. Jesse Gilbert decided to arrange mental-health counselling for employees at the eight-person RCMP detachment in Fort Smith, N.W.T., located near the Alberta border.

"Well, it seemed like it made more sense to fly one person here, rather than flying everyone out," says Gilbert, the detachment commander. "Fort Smith is a great place, but there just aren't any mental-health supports. Many smaller communities don't or can't provide mental-health treatment, so I wanted to help change that, at least a little."

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Like any other Canadian town or city where RCMP employees are stationed, northern detachments receive a variety of calls for service. Requests for help are sometimes mundane, but sometimes also dramatic. Those latter calls can range from suicides, domestic violence complaints, assaults and other volatile situations where the aftermath can have a profound impact on an officer's mental health.

RCMP officers are also highly visible

in smaller communities, unlike big cities where residents may only encounter police occasionally.

In addition, officers have to deal with an evolving work culture. That's because the idea that they should be tough enough "to suck it up and move on from tough situations," as one RCMP officer put it, is still on the minds of many officers.

"But we're changing that," says Gilbert. "We have to be accountable and members also face a lot of pressure."

In an effort to spark change, Gilbert turned to the detachment's staff — and health officials in the RCMP and territory's health department — to discuss the importance of mental health and counselling care. He also got their support to arrange Fort Smith-based counselling sessions, where officers could, if they chose to, discuss any issues.

"People finally recognize how important mental health is and that we have to make every effort to address problems," he says. "It's important to get people to talk."

Arrangements were made to fly a psychologist into the community. After making a presentation, the psychologist offered private discussions upon request.

One officer who participated in the presentation and asked to remain anonymous, says he was comforted knowing he's not alone in feeling anxious or worried about on-the-job issues.

"I attended and it was interesting to see

other people thinking the same things you are," he says. "It was good to see others talking about the challenges of dealing with the issues associated with policing."

FIRST STAGE OF RECOVERY

Dr. Barbara Schmalz, an RCMP psychologist based in Calgary, helped organize and support the event.

"Police officers need to remember they are human and may need help like anyone else," she says.

Schmalz, who gave a lot of credit to Gilbert for co-ordinating the counselling, says the first stage of recovery from large-scale or crisis events begins with education and awareness.

"It's important for officers, and everyone, to understand they shouldn't let things get too bad," she says. "Let's make sure we get people help as soon as they need it."

The first session was held in October 2018 and Gilbert says plans are underway to provide more gatherings with mental-health specialists.

He adds that employees need to learn to help themselves.

"We run short so often (in the detachments) that no one wants to take the time off when they're feeling stressed," he says. "By leaving, they feel that they're placing further burden on the remaining members. So out of compassion, they don't take medical days."

"But they need to seek out help and avoid reaching a crisis point." ■



Sgt. Jesse Gilbert (centre) helped arrange mental-health counselling for RCMP employees in Fort Smith, N.W.T.



CHALLENGING PERCEPTIONS

NEW HOPE FOR OFFICERS WITH MONOCULAR VISION

By Patricia Vasylychuk

When the removal of a tumour on his optic nerve in 2013 left him blind in one eye, Cst. Michael Jaszczyszyn was told he would never return to active duty again. But he didn't let policy seal his fate. He spent almost three years setting a precedent that changed how the RCMP assesses its visual standards.

Jaszczyszyn lost one sixth of his peripheral vision and initially struggled with depth perception. When he returned to work in 2014, it was to a new position offered to him under the RCMP's duty to accommodate people with disabilities.

"I love being a cop and I couldn't accept sitting at a desk for the rest of my career," he says.

Jaszczyszyn took all the standard RCMP recertification courses and a gamut of additional police training, most of it at the instructor level. He completed the majority with top scores.

To improve his depth perception, which the eyes detect within a one-metre span, Jaszczyszyn strategically trained in disciplines that focused on close-range skills, such as precision-shooting, firearm handling, handcuffing, and grappling.

He says the training helped his eye adapt to the vision loss, to a degree that didn't impact his ability to do the job of an active duty officer. He has a medical certificate confirming it.

MAKING EXCEPTIONS

But, as outlined in the RCMP's Health Services Manual, the medical profile of an officer with monocular vision — vision in only one eye — restricts them from being fully operational. At the time, the assessment process didn't allow exceptions.

But Jaszczyszyn set out to prove he was the exception. In a grievor's rebuttal, he argued that the RCMP's rationale was "outdated and unjustifiably discriminatory" and that each case should be examined uniquely instead of using a one-size-fits-all approach.

"There was no evidence to support that all individuals with monocular vision will have these limitations," says Jaszczyszyn. "Some people are able to fully adapt



RCMP

Despite having vision in only one eye, Cst. Jaszczyszyn took multiple tactical and weapons training to help his remaining vision compensate for the loss.

to the point that their limitations are not a hindrance and I demonstrated that I'm one of them."

"We'd never seen a case like this before," says Dr. Josée Pilon, the RCMP's national medical advisor. Her unit conducted a year-long review of the force's standards on monocular vision.

"This is not the accepted practice in a lot of policing organizations, national or international, so there was intensive consultation with experts and the scientific community."

In June 2017, three years after he returned to work, Jaszczyszyn was finally told his argument was found to have merit and he would be allowed to return to active duty.

"We had to look at what scientific evidence is out there and challenge our occupational standards so that we're always following best practices and evolving," says Pilon.

While the standard on visual acuity remains the same, a monocular exception is now in place. Each case is now individually assessed. The underlying causes of the disability, whether there's been adaptation and the remaining visual functions, are now taken into account.

"The diagnosis does not define the person. You also have to look at their abilities," says Pilon. "Some people reprogram their brain to operate on other visual cues and develop skills, such as subtle head movements, where the eye compensates for the loss of vision."

SECOND CHANCES

Today, Jaszczyszyn works general duty at Stony Plain detachment, one of the busiest in Alberta. A handful of others like him have been able to return to active duty since the change in policy.

When an officer becomes temporarily or permanently disabled, whether physically or mentally, the RCMP's primary goal is to support and retain its officers, according to Tamara Morriss, acting director of the Disability Management and Accommodation Program.

She says when an officer can't continue to perform their duties because of an illness, injury or disability, the RCMP searches for another existing position that matches their skill-set and experience. Depending on availability, that could mean relocating to another city or province. ■

STRESS-FREE TRANSITION

GUIDEBOOK HELPS OFFICERS GET READY TO RETIRE

By Paul Northcott

Although many people will tell you they can't wait to retire, for others the process is a challenging and emotional experience.

That can be especially true in the RCMP, where officers have worked for years in communities and are heavily invested in the people they serve.

"For many, it's a big and tough decision. At least it was for me," says ret. Supt. Yvon de Champlain, who left the RCMP in 2017 after a 30-year career working in Ottawa, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

"But there was a huge void in the processes," says S/Sgt. Doug Wasylenki, who is the peer-to-peer co-ordinator in Alberta.

Wasylenki says when he first joined the RCMP, "every step in the hiring process was handed to you. You were told what to do and when to do it. So, based on that concept, why should retirement be any different?"

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

The idea for a retirement guidebook for police officers and managers in Alberta was first conceived by ret. S/Sgt. Ron Campbell. Once created, it led to the establishment of a three-person team to provide support.

"Ron retired and passed on the concept to me. After that, I ran with it," says Wasylenki.

The other team members include Sgt. Niki Borden, non-commissioned officer of employee services, and Mavis Callihoo, a member of the Employee Relations Divisional Wellness Unit. Callihoo says many officers need help learning about the RCMP's retirement resources.

Common questions include the timing of pension payouts and health coverage, and how to turn in their kit or confirm leave allotments are correct. Callihoo says officers also ask about their badge encasement, and how long it will take.

"That's a big one," says Wasylenki. "But a lot of officers don't really pay attention to that right away. I know mine is an important part of my identity and I'd want to make sure it's taken care of."



S/Sgt. Doug Wasylenki and Mavis Callihoo are part of a team in Alberta that supports RCMP officers and managers as they plan to retire.

EASING RETIREMENT STRESS

De Champlain says the guide and the team made his retirement process seamless.

"With their help, I never felt alone," says de Champlain, who notes that the handbook isn't useful only for those about to retire.

He says a troop mate who retired a few years ago was asking him questions about joining the RCMP Veterans Association.

"So I got him the guide (which addressed that issue). I think it can be a valuable tool for those already retired who still have questions," says de Champlain, who also marvels at how quickly the team would respond to his queries.

"I remember sending emails and I would get a response back in 30 seconds. That's unheard of. They are true public servants."

Callihoo says when officers begin the retirement process, they express both fear and excitement about their post-retirement life.

"One of the main reasons this retirement handbook has been created is to make the transition easier," she says.

"And to provide clear directions on the processes to follow so it can be as stress free as possible."

Wasylenki echoes that sentiment.

"When an officer makes the decision to retire, they have a lot on their mind," he says. "The last thing they want to do is search manuals and locate forms and procedures. Hopefully the handbook can help make this transition painless."

The Employee Handbook for Retiring K Division Members is available on the RCMP's internal website under employee tools.

Before its posting in early 2016, the original guide was tested on a group of officers of varying ranks and years of service.

Wasylenki says based on officer feedback, changes were made to the handbook. The team continues to update the document.

"We always ask officers what's missing and what can make it better," he says.

A new National Discharge and Retirement Guide is also available on the RCMP's internal website. ■

RCMP

COVER

RECRUITING TO RETIREMENT



"GRASSROOTS POLICING AT ITS FINEST"

RCMP RESERVE PROGRAM OFFERS RETIRED OFFICERS EMPLOYMENT

By Travis Poland

Reservist Al Jagoe knew he couldn't completely step away from police work when he retired after more than 35 years with the RCMP.

"I can't get it out of my blood," he says.

Jagoe decided to apply to the RCMP Reserve Program giving him the chance to continue police work.

Launched in 2004, the program hires former police officers to provide short-term operational assistance during special events or when regular RCMP officers are on leave.

S/Sgt. Downey Brockelbank, non-commissioned officer in charge of the national reserve program, says it allows the RCMP to meet immediate operational needs without major disruptions at other detachments.

"We had some reservists help during the G7. They're also available to draw on if there's a natural disaster or emergency in addition to vacancies in detachments," says Brockelbank.

FLEXIBILITY

Retired or resigned RCMP members, as well as former members of other Canadian police forces, can apply for the program giving them the chance to transition from full-time work.

Reservists are appointed for three years and can work as much as they like during that time when duties are available.

"I've worked nine months a year, but people choose to work less too," says Jagoe, who's worked at almost every RCMP detachment in Nunavut since joining the Reserve Program in 2015.

"A lot of reservists like the fact that they can choose to work only a few months of the year," says Brockelbank. "Some are snowbirds and spend time down south."

On the job, a reservist has the same responsibilities, powers and duties as regular police officers. The wage is based on that of a senior constable and all reservists must meet the same medical and fitness standards as current officers.

"They do the same work as a badge-wearing, gun-carrying, regular member," says Brockelbank.

Currently, there are about 400 members in the program, but the RCMP hopes to grow the list to 1,200. Reservists must have at least two years' experience with a Canadian police force and be a graduate of a Canadian police training institution.

Reservist Anne O'Shaughnessy says joining the RCMP Reserve gave her the chance to work in community policing, something she always enjoyed during her career.

"In some of the smaller communities, we play sports with the local school and help organize the breakfast program," she says.

"If you're looking to go back to what you really thought policing was and what it should be, this is the place to be," says Jagoe. "It can be challenging, but it's rewarding."

Brockelbank says reservists can share their invaluable experience acting as a mentor where they're posted.

"We get to share experiences with the people we meet and learn from one another," says O'Shaughnessy.

Reservist Jerry McKenna, who started with the program in 2015, says the operational experience that reservists bring to detachments helps them connect

with the community.

"You can help out at the school, with the council and even at the clinic if they need it," says McKenna.

TRAVEL

Reservists often stay in their home province, but there is the opportunity to travel to far-away detachments.

During McKenna's more than 35 years with the RCMP, he had 19 different postings and moved 11 times. But when he retired, he still had more to see. McKenna applied for the Reserve Program in part to work in Canada's North.

"It's a privilege to see part of the country that most people don't get the chance to," says McKenna, who was once posted in Grise Fiord, the RCMP's northern-most detachment.

O'Shaughnessy, who lives on Prince Edward Island, says the chance to travel drew her to the Reserve Program.

"There's so many different climates to experience," she says. "I was able to see places without having to stay for three years."

Jagoe says the Reserve Program is one of the best things a retired member can choose to do.

"This is a phenomenal experience," says Jagoe. "It's grassroots policing at its finest." ■



Reservist Al Jagoe (left), seen here with RCMP pilot Colin Gunn, says one of the best things about the RCMP Reserve Program is the chance to serve in the North.

Special Constable Moe Ikkidluak

RECRUITING TO RETIREMENT
COVER

Convicted Offenders Index (COI)

NDDB processes biological samples from convicted offenders and enters the DNA profiles into the COI.

Types of samples collected



Blood



Cells inside the cheek



Hair

More than
98%
are blood samples

22,267
new convicted
offender samples
received in 2017-2018*



DNA orders can be issued for offenders convicted of any of **350+** qualifying offences such as

- Murder
- Sexual assault
- Assault
- Uttering threats
- Failure to appear or comply
- Break and enter
- Drug offences



Comparing DNA found at a crime scene against DNA of convicted offenders can lead to a match or "offender hit"



Helps identify a suspect



Helps eliminate suspects

5,298
offender hits
in 2017-2018*

Crime Scene Index (CSI)

Forensic laboratories process biological samples left at crime scenes and enter the DNA profiles into the CSI.



13,863
new CSI entries
in 2017-2018*



Comparing DNA found at different crime scenes can lead to a match or "forensic hit"



Helps link crimes for which no suspects have been identified



Helps determine if a serial offender is involved

453
forensic hits
in 2017-2018*

55,275
offender and forensic hits
as of March 31, 2018

April 1, 2017 - March 31, 2018 *



CANADA'S WESTERN EDGE

SMALL-TOWN WORK DOESN'T MEAN SLOW DAYS

By Paul Northcott

Tucked away near the Yukon–Alaska border is the RCMP's western-most detachment of Beaver Creek.

Surrounded by rugged and beautiful scenery in a remote part of Canada, Beaver Creek detachment looks like a quiet place to work. However, officers' stories about their work life — serving a huge region with a small population — tell a different story.

"Oh, there's lots to do, and it's not like you're sitting behind a desk all day," says Cst. Jerome Lacasse, who notes the tourist population booms during the summer. "That adds to the workload."

Beaver Creek is secluded from other Yukon towns. It's located almost 300 kilometers north of Haines Junction and more than 450 kilometers from Whitehorse. The town's main employers include the Canada Border Services Agency, the White River First Nation and a number of tourist lodges that serve outdoor enthusiasts.

HELPING PEOPLE

It's a small place in a big land. But that's what

Cpl. Kim MacKellar, the detachment commander, enjoys about the area.

"I like small-town Canada. I like the winters up here and that's part of the attraction — the life you lead during and after work," says MacKellar, who has served all over the Yukon. "Here, we have a responsibility for pretty much everything in the community."

There are requests to help residents with cutting wood, pulling cars out of snow banks, breaking trail and wild animals in the community, among other issues.

There are also calls to help locate missing hunters, hikers and travellers.

"They (the detachment officers) are the only show in town when it comes to search and rescue or to assist the general public along the busy Alaska Highway," says Insp. Lindsay Ellis, the district commander for the Yukon RCMP.

But that doesn't mean Beaver Creek doesn't see a few unusual occurrences.

The detachment is close to the Canada–U.S. border so that means, on occasion, there are "runners," says MacKellar.

Sometimes people cross without docu-

mentation, accidentally or on purpose.

In 2014, MacKellar says a man from Eastern Europe crossed into Canada from the United States and was then apprehended — carrying a loaded hand gun. "He was arrested and deported afterwards," says MacKellar.

Ellis says the challenges of working in a place like Beaver Creek are no different than many isolated posts in the RCMP.

The important thing, says Ellis, is to remember the opportunities that exist to "positively influence a community every day."

She also credits MacKellar — who is set to retire in June 2019 — for his role in serving the region.

"Cpl. MacKellar has been a huge part of community policing in Yukon, not only to Beaver Creek, but the adjacent detachment of Haines Junction, where he has worked and lived for the last 15 years," says Ellis.

REMOTE BUT REWARDING

While some officers work their entire careers in Yukon, it isn't for everyone.

Lacasse offers advice to newly graduated constables who may be interested in a posting to Beaver Creek: "I'd say wait."

"The new graduates are so tech-savvy and focused on many aspects of policing, they're probably not ready for a posting like this right away," he says. "Coming up here too soon might be difficult. Life is different here than in the south, but the rewards are great."

Lacasse adds that for any new officer arriving, it doesn't take long to get to know everyone and become part of the community.

"Within two or three months, I think everyone knew who I was," says Lacasse, who at 30 is the junior member of the three-officer detachment.

Ellis also says that officers must remember to depend on one another.

"They need to problem solve without infinite resources and be willing to be flexible and demonstrate innovation," says Ellis. "And they need to rely on the relationships they develop within the community." ■

RCMP



RCMP officers who work in communities such as Beaver Creek, Yukon, can expect busy days and a wide variety of calls for service.

AT THE READY

TRAINING, HEALTH SUPPORTS KEEP ERT MEMBERS PREPARED

By Paul Northcott

Members of the RCMP's Emergency Response Teams (ERT) train to go into high-risk situations with the knowledge, skill and ability to diffuse danger, save lives and look out for their colleagues.

Sgt. Mike Ballard, National ERT training coordinator, says they're also carrying something else.

"Confidence in their ability and comfort in the environment are critical to performance," says Ballard. "If an ERT member lacks confidence in themselves, or their team, then they will not be able to perform the required task effectively."

Over the past 40 years, the ERT Program has grown to include 16 teams based across much of the country. Most of the teams consist of both full-time and part-time members.

After passing physical and psychological tests, newcomers spend two months working to maintain and improve their fitness and advance their skills in areas such as specialized weapons, rappelling, close-quarter combat, searches and tactics to resolve extremely tense and risky situations.

For new ERT recruits, Ballard says those skills are taught and practised until they become second nature.

"There's extensive use of scenario-based training where the candidates will apply their skills in stressful encounters using realistic training environments and actors," he says. "This helps them to accept that they might experience violent encounters but it will be something they have physically and mentally been prepared for."

GOT YOUR BACK

ERT members spend a lot of time together. They acknowledge their job, training and some outside-of-work social activities create a close-knit group of people who always look out for one another.

Sgt. Paul Desjardins, who provides operational support to the Ottawa-based National Division ERT, says that means officers are often aware when a colleague has a problem.

"We spend a lot of time together. If



Full- and part-time RCMP Emergency Response Team members train to be prepared for any potential crisis.

someone's not feeling right or acting right, we'll notice it and talk about it," he says, while noting the same connection exists among the part-time ERTs across the country.

"But the challenging part is when there's stuff going on at home, which we don't know about or recognize right away."

Sgt. Jamie McGowan, the RCMP's national ERT co-ordinator, says taking care of the mental and physical well-being of members is crucial to ERT's success.

An ERT veteran, McGowan says members can face dramatic and life-altering situations at a moment's notice. He also says ERT part-timers face unique challenges because at one moment they could be at a road-side stop and then hours later called to an ERT deployment.

"We ask a lot of everyone on the team," says McGowan. "That's why we need to do as much as we can to ensure the mental and physical health of our members — because of the tasks we ask them to do."

EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Mental-health workshops are already mandatory for all RCMP employees and there are many resources in the organization.

These resources include programs

such as the Support for Operational Stress Injury Program, Member Workplace Services Program, workplace accommodation, occupational health and safety officers, peer-to-peer system, informal conflict management, harassment advisors and others.

Anne-Marie Gauthier is the health and wellness strategic planner at National Division in Ottawa.

She says it's difficult to determine how widely those programs are tapped into in part because of privacy issues. But it's her understanding those resources are used by all employees.

Gauthier adds it's vital to keep employees informed about the programs.

"It is really important for us to keep promoting those resources to make sure all employees know that they exist," she says. "It's even better to seek the help needed as soon as possible to promote a quicker return to health."

Desjardins admits that officers with ERT may have been reluctant to avail themselves of such services but attitudes are changing.

"Years ago it was different. But now, members are more willing to talk," says Desjardins. ■



DEEP DIVE

BRINGING CLOSURE FOR FAMILIES OF DROWNING VICTIMS

RCMP



For RCMP divers like Sgt. Andy Pulo and Cpl. John Stringer, returning a loved one to their family is the most rewarding part of their job.

In most Canadian provinces, when a body is lost in the water, RCMP underwater recovery divers like Sgt. Andy Pulo and Cpl. John Stringer are ready to search the cold, dark depths to find it. Pulo and Stringer, who work in Manitoba and British Columbia respectively, have 46 years of diving experience between them. Patricia Vasylchuk spoke to them about their work and what motivates them to dive.

WHAT'S DIVING LIKE?

JS: Envision yourself in complete darkness, because 50 to 90 per cent of our work is done in zero visibility. Nobody likes that when you're down there but, if you're focused on the task, you can convince yourself that it's an OK place to be. You've got to really love diving first and be OK with searching for evidence or human remains in an unknown, dangerous environment.

WHAT'S FINDING A BODY LIKE?

JS: My first few recoveries, when you come through the water and all of sudden there's a dead body in front of you, it was a little bit shocking. But I've learned to make finding it the goal, so when I'm searching I constantly

expect to find it.

AP: I was on highway patrol for two years, and some of the horrific scenes I've seen there don't even compare to recovering a person who's been a victim of drowning.

WHY DO YOU DO IT?

JS: For me, bringing somebody back for the family is the incentive. When you do, the family is just relieved and thankful.

AP: There's been many people who we weren't able to recover. In those cases, families don't get the closure needed as part of the grieving process. So when we're successful, bringing families that closure is very rewarding for me.

IS THE VICTIM'S FAMILY USUALLY AT THE DIVE SITE?

JS: Quite often. I always talk to them when we're done and they give you a hug and are thankful that we just show up to look. It makes it worth it.

AP: At more isolated spots, the families are usually not there. But, in some remote Indigenous communities, there's usually a big crowd that gather for vigils and to give

us ideas about where they think the victim might be.

DO YOU GET NERVOUS?

AP: There aren't many things that scare me. I think that most of the time the scariest thing is what's in your own imagination. There aren't any monsters that are going to reach out and grab you. It's a matter of remaining calm and keeping in mind that you're in a risky environment.

JS: I'm totally comfortable; I wouldn't do it if I wasn't. You need to have the confidence that when you're in the water, you can get out of any situation.

AP: And you have to rely on your teammates.

JS: Yeah, when you rely on the strengths of the team, you know that if you get into a situation that you can't get out of, somebody's going to rescue you.

HOW FAST CAN YOU RESPOND TO A CALL?

AP: It depends on the availability of team members. Most of the divers do this part time — there are only eight full-timers nationally — so it's sometimes difficult to get a



ASK AN EXPERT

team together because you're competing with their substantive positions. Also, most of my team is spread out through the province, we don't have a centralized team in one spot. I even have two members in isolated posts, so if I can get them, I have to fly them. Realistically, it can take up to two days to assemble a team and attend a dive call in Manitoba.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU GET CALLS?

AP: With my team it depends on the year. We've had as few as 17 calls and as many as 36 calls in a year.

JS: In B.C., we had 90 calls this year.

IS THERE A BUSY SEASON?

JS: Ours is about May to September. That's recreational time on the water, which means a lot of drownings.

AP: For us in Manitoba, the calls are more spread out until the lakes and rivers have good thick ice on them. Then the calls drop off because there are fewer falls through the ice.

DO YOU SEARCH ONLY FOR BODIES?

AP: We've recovered all sorts of items that were used in crimes that were needed as evidence in a police investigation. We recover a lot of cars and planes, too. We also secure the waterfronts that are being visited by VIPs. Like, in Manitoba, when the Queen was here, she was going to take a vessel ride on the Red River and we had to clear the harbour for possible explosives.

DO YOU PRESERVE EVIDENCE?

JS: If there's lots of little pieces everywhere, like from an explosion, you'd grid that off into sections like a crime scene on land. For most of our work dives, though, we're only talking about a few items. Body parts or pieces of evidence we bag or put in a can with the water sealed in it.

AP: We even bag the hands of murder victims to preserve evidence that might be underneath the fingernails.

WHAT'S THE VISIBILITY LIKE UNDER-WATER?

AP: It varies from site to site. Most of the dives we do in Manitoba we really can't see anything. The water looks like chocolate milk and you're just feeling around trying to find what you're looking for.

JS: On occasion there's a good one though. We just did an evidence recovery on the

north coast of B.C. and it was unbelievable visibility. It was spectacular. Huge kelp beds moving in the surf, shells and fish. It looked like an aquarium. It was the nicest work dive I've ever done.

WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

AP: Snagging, decompression, equipment failure. The most common thing is swimming into something and getting stuck, like in timber or fish nets. Bridges are really bad for items being thrown off of them and timber stacking up around pilings. I've even seen a big stack of bicycles one on top of another by a bridge piling. Even stacked cars, which could topple and crush a diver.

JS: Diving in a current is very risky especially when you can't see. If your line gets stuck or if the current is pushing you into a tree root ball it's much more dangerous because now you have to fight against the pressure of the water to get out.

WHAT DO YOU WEAR?

JS: We have a rubberized dry suit to protect against contaminants, whether it be oil, gas or body fluids. It's completely sealed at the wrist and neck down. You can vary the layers underneath because the suit doesn't insulate, it just protects you from the water. So, if you're in freezing water you can wear a thick undergarment. In the summertime,

I'd probably just wear a light shirt and pants. The tanks we use are steel, so they're heavier than sport diving gear. And we use a full-face mask that allows us to talk to each other through a microphone and ear piece. The complete package weighs close to 100 pounds.

HOW DEEP DO YOU DIVE?

JS: Most of our dives are above 20 meters, but the max depth that we will go is 45 metres.

AP: Most dives in Manitoba are under 18 metres.

WHAT'S THE FUN SIDE?

AP: We do a lot of plane crashes in Manitoba. So once we remove the remains, for me the fun part's actually raising the plane and getting it to shore — the mechanics of rigging it up and lifting. It's challenging and I like the problem-solving aspect. I've only ever done one helicopter but bush planes are quite common.

HOW CAN SOMEONE BECOME AN RCMP DIVER?

JS: They need to have been working with the RCMP for two years. And they need to already be a certified diver from an accredited SCUBA diving agency, and have logged 25 hours under water. ■



RCMP divers work year round. The busiest time is from May to September during peak recreation season, and in early winter or spring when waters aren't fully frozen.



RECRUITMENT COMES FULL CIRCLE

ONE CONSTABLE'S JOURNEY FROM CADET TO RECRUITER

By Brett Makulowich

Cst. Brooke Turnbull's journey to becoming an RCMP officer and recruiter has come full circle.

In 2012, 16-year-old Brooke Turnbull met Cpl. Ronald Bumbry at the RCMP recruitment booth at Rotary Career Symposium in Winnipeg, Man. Three and a half years later, Turnbull is the one giving the recruiting presentation.

Here's a timeline of Cst. Turnbull's journey from cadet to constable, and the key role her recruiter and field coach played.

April 2012 – Brooke Turnbull stops at the RCMP booth at the Rotary Career Symposium in Winnipeg. She asks Cpl. Bumbry if he would give a recruiting presentation at her school, St. Norbert High School.

May 2012 – Cpl. Bumbry makes a presentation at the high school, where Turnbull asks a lot of questions.

"The presentation opened my eyes to how many different specializations and opportunities the RCMP had to offer over other police forces," says Turnbull.

Bumbry can tell that Turnbull wants to become a police officer.

2012 – Turnbull attends several Pre-PARE (Physical Abilities Requirement Evaluation) sessions that Cpl. Bumbry hosts to prepare potential applicants for the RCMP's Training Academy known as Depot.

The PARE is an occupational test used to assess a person's ability to perform the physical demands of police work. It's used throughout the career of an RCMP officer, including cadets.

August 2013 – Turnbull is selected to attend the RCMP Depot Youth Summer Camp.

The camp is designed for young adults to experience what it's like to be a cadet at Depot. The application process includes a 45-minute interview and an essay. Turnbull is one of six people chosen from Manitoba.

Once at camp, Turnbull becomes the right marker — the quasi leader of the troop.

"I experienced what it was like to be a cadet, to double time around the base, work together as a troop and push myself further than ever before," says Turnbull. "I remem-

ber how smart and professional the RCMP cadets looked marching around the base. I realized I wanted to be like them one day."

June-August 2014 – Turnbull participates in the Indigenous Pre-Cadet Training Program at Depot.

The program is for people of Indigenous descent to work with RCMP officers in the field to show them what general duty policing entails. Turnbull applies and is one of 25 people chosen to attend from across Canada.

The program starts with two months of training at Depot. Again, Turnbull is the right marker of her troop.

Once in the field, Turnbull performs relief work in several northern First Nations detachments in Manitoba. She also participates in the Annual Assembly election of the Grand Chief of Manitoba, Treaty Day celebrations and suicide prevention training.

March 13, 2015 – Turnbull receives the phone call that every RCMP applicant dreams of — she's asked to be at Depot in two days to start her official training to become a police officer. After the nine-month application process, she can hardly wait.

Sept. 28, 2015 – She graduates alongside her troop mates at Depot. She can now call herself Cst. Turnbull.

Sept. 29, 2015 – Cst. Turnbull begins her field training at Peguis First Nation detachment in Manitoba. Bumbry, who recently transferred to the same detachment, is her field trainer.

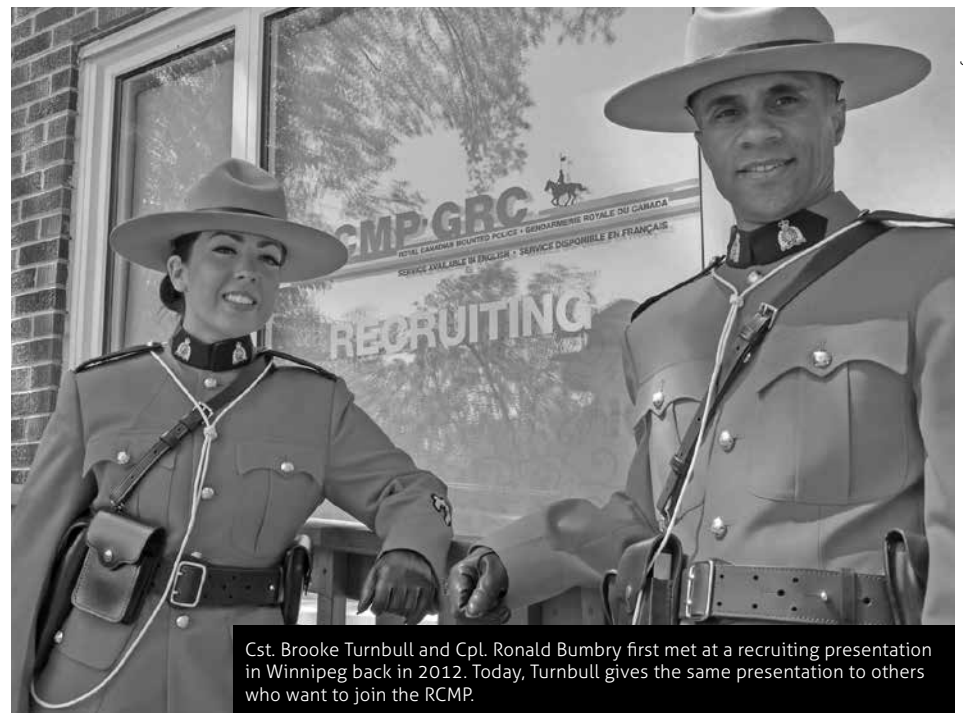
"The chances of her coming back to Manitoba were slim," says Cpl. Bumbry. "The chances of her coming to my detachment were slimmer and the chances of becoming her field coach seemed impossible. But it did happen and the torch has now been passed."

October 2015 – Cst. Turnbull gives an RCMP recruiting presentation at Peguis Central School to grades 9 to 12 — the same presentation Bumbry presented at St. Norbert High School in 2012.

"The circle was complete — from student to police officer to RCMP recruiter," says Bumbry.

"I felt honoured that Brooke has chosen our organization over others. Her positive attitude and dedication to the work and community she serves was very apparent from the beginning."

Cpl. Bumbry is now a media relations officer in Alberta. Cst. Turnbull is posted to Steinbach detachment in Manitoba. ■



Brittany Filz

Cst. Brooke Turnbull and Cpl. Ronald Bumbry first met at a recruiting presentation in Winnipeg back in 2012. Today, Turnbull gives the same presentation to others who want to join the RCMP.