RCMP
ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

GAZETTE

SERVING THE POLICE COMMUNITY SINCE 1939

2019 MARCOM GOLD AWARD WINNER

VOL. 82, NO. 1, 2020

BUILDING TRUST

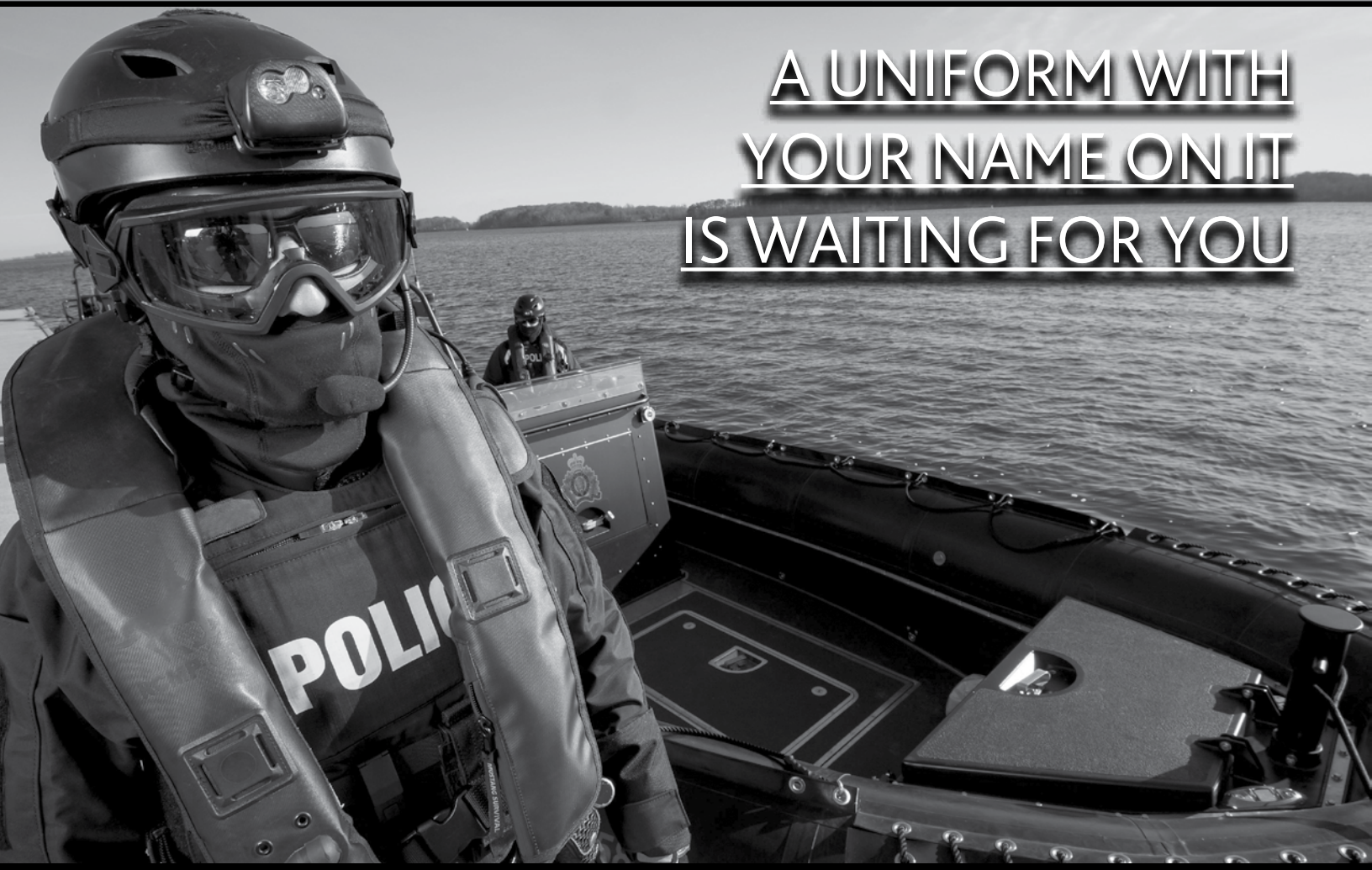
LEARNING FROM INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

RCMP-GRC.GC.CA

Royal Canadian Mounted Police | Gendarmerie royale du Canada

Canada

RCMP
ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE



OVER 150 CAREER SPECIALIZATIONS

With a vast range of career specializations and opportunities for growth and training, the RCMP offers a career like no other.

rcmpcareers.ca

Royal Canadian Mounted Police | Gendarmerie royale du Canada

Canada

GAZETTE
Serving the police community since 1939
Vol. 82, No. 1, 2020
A Royal Canadian Mounted Police Publication

COVER SECTION

DEPARTMENTS

ON THE COVER:
RCMP officers work every day to build trust and credibility with the more than 600 Indigenous communities they serve across Canada.

Photo: *Karen Joyner, RCMP*

EDITORIAL MESSAGE

MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS

The RCMP serves more than 600 Indigenous communities across Canada — each of them unique in their culture, geography and needs.

In this issue, we look at the ways in which RCMP officers work every day to build trust and credibility with Indigenous Peoples in Canada, improve the health and safety of the communities they serve, and expand their own understanding of Indigenous history and present-day realities.

For our cover, Travis Poland writes about several initiatives in Manitoba where the RCMP serves many First Nations communities in remote locations.

In his first story, Poland looks at the RCMP's role in helping to evacuate the small community of Black Sturgeon Falls from an approaching wildfire in 2018. Officers credit their relationship with the community for helping the evacuation move smoothly — not just in 2018, but again last summer.

He also features a new drive-in policing model in northern Manitoba. The approach allows RCMP officers to have a full-time presence in the remote community of South Indian Lake, which sits within the O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation. Increasing police visibility allows officers to build and maintain relationships with the community while preserving a sustainable work-life balance.

In his third piece, Poland writes about the RCMP Air Services Program that supports officers who work in remote locations. Air Services pilots in Manitoba fly officers and essential equipment into these communities, which may be accessible only by plane at certain times of the year. To call it a lifeline isn't an exaggeration.

As mentioned already, building relationships is an important first step in supporting Indigenous communities.

Paul Northcott writes about a productive partnership between the RCMP and the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service, who have two liaison officers working together. The officers organize community events and safety presentations to address local concerns, but also take crucial steps toward reconciliation and healing.

Northcott also describes two initiatives in which RCMP officers help foster safety in the Indigenous communities they serve.

The first is a community-led safety plan being developed in New Brunswick. Residents of Esgenoopetitj First Nation have been holding open discussions with community partners, including police, to identify safety risks and design a tailored plan to address them.

In Port Alberni, B.C., RCMP have created a unit that works to help the most vulnerable in the Nuu-chah-nulth community. The Indigenous Safety Team is made up of three officers who work with the tribal council to find help and support for people living in the streets.

We also feature stories about the ways in which RCMP cadets are learning more about Indigenous history to prepare them for policing in the present, and how officers are getting involved in projects that support community resilience, strong families and Indigenous identity.

We close our issue with the story of one officer's personal reconciliation project.

Acknowledging change is important. We hope this issue sheds light on some of the genuine and caring work being done by RCMP officers in partnership with the Indigenous communities they serve. ■

— Katherine Aldred

CHANGES TO *GAZETTE* MAGAZINE

Gazette magazine is moving toward more online stories and digital products.

Starting in 2020, we will be printing the paper magazine two times a year — in spring and in fall. While we are reducing the number of copies we distribute and the frequency of the print product, that doesn't mean there will be fewer stories.

We're proud to continue providing all our award-winning content on our website, where we are publishing new stories every week. If you haven't seen it, *Gazette* magazine's website is easy to read, searchable, accessible and available on mobile devices. You can find us on Infoweb or RCMP.ca under the A-Z index.

And stay tuned in 2020 for a brand new look to make it even easier for you to view the stories you enjoy online.

Thank you.

GAZETTE

PUBLISHER: Kevin Fowler

EDITOR: Katherine Aldred

WRITERS: Paul Northcott, Travis Poland

WEB PUBLISHER: Patricia Vasylchuk

GRAPHIC DESIGN: Jennifer Wale, Samantha Clusiau-Lawlor

TRANSLATION: RCMP Translation Services

PRINTING: Performance Printing

The *Gazette* (ISSN 1196-6513) is published in English and French by the National Communication Services of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Ottawa. The views expressed in any material published in the magazine or in its online version are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement 40064068. The *Gazette* is published four (4) times a year and is issued free of charge on a limited basis to accredited police forces and agencies within the criminal justice system. Personal subscriptions are not available.

The *Gazette* welcomes contributions, letters, articles and comments in either official language. We reserve the right to edit for length, content and clarity. © 2020 RCMP.

HOW TO REACH US:

RCMP *Gazette*
73 Leikin Drive
M8 Building, 1st Floor, Room 801
Ottawa, ON K1A 0R2
CANADA

Phone: 613-843-4570
E-mail: gazette@rcmp-grc.gc.ca
Internet: www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/gazette

STAY CONNECTED WITH THE RCMP

Visit our website:
www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca

Follow us on Facebook:
www.facebook.com/rcmpgrc

Follow us on Twitter:
@rcmpgrcpolice #rcmpgazette

Watch us on YouTube:
www.youtube.com/rcmpgrcpolice

Follow us on Instagram:
@rcmpgrcpolice

RCMP TEST ONLINE CRIME REPORTING

By Travis Poland

An online reporting system is saving police officers and residents time and resources.

The RCMP launched an online crime-reporting project in four B.C. communities last summer. It allows residents to report minor incidents without calling the police

The tool helps ensure that front-line officers and dispatchers can focus on the most pressing cases.

"It frees up our officers and time is a valuable commodity here with our high call volume," says Insp. Paul MacDougall, with the RCMP's Kelowna detachment.

RCMP in Richmond, Surrey and Ridge Meadows also started the program last summer.

MacDougall says for less-serious calls, officers often collect information and fill out reports. Now that can be done without an officer present using the online tool.

"It gives more time for an officer to engage in proactive initiatives, more time to be seen in the community and more time to deal with serious incidents" he says.

Residents who report a crime online start with an interactive map and a few questions to make sure it's appropriate to submit. After email verification, the user provides more details on the date, time and circumstances before filing.

The tool accepts incidents that don't need police follow up, have no witness or suspect, involve damage of less than $5,000, and don't concern personal identity, firearms or licence plates.

Data from the reports bolster police understanding of community trends, helping to direct resources where they're needed most.

RCMP employees designed the reporting tool to suit the organization and work seamlessly with the British Columbia RCMP's record management system.

"An off-the-shelf product wouldn't meet our needs and the best path forward was to have control," says Chad Ciavarro, a senior project manager with the RCMP information management and technology branch.

"If we want to add an important crime type or have it work in another province, we have the skills, knowledge and people to do that," he says. ■

POLICE CUT-OUTS TARGET DANGEROUS DRIVERS

By Paul Northcott

There's more behind the RCMP cut-outs positioned at various intersections around Surrey, B.C., than meets the eye.

"These areas weren't randomly picked," says Sgt. Ian MacLellan, the acting Traffic Services Commander in Surrey, B.C. "We identified high-risk traffic intersections."

The planning, monitoring and research into their use will hopefully reduce fatalities, injuries and driving speeds in the city of more than 500,000.

In October, police set up several two-dimensional cut-outs — each showing the image of an RCMP officer by their police vehicle pointing their laser detector at traffic.

Police partnered with the City of Surrey and the Insurance Corporation of B.C. to pilot the initiative targeting speeding drivers.

"It's ambitious but we need to plan, design and build a transportation network where everyone — motorists, pedestrians and cyclists — are safe on Surrey's roads," says Shabnem Afzal, the road safety manager for the City of Surrey and the lead for Vision Zero Surrey — an initiative to eliminate death and serious injuries on city roads.

MacLellan says the cut-outs will be moved around the city and data will be analyzed from each intersection, both with and without the cut-outs.

Police decoys have been used internationally and in other provinces such as Alberta and Ontario for years. In 2018, Sgt. Quentin Frewing worked with the City of Coquitlam to create a police officer cut-out that also tracked the effectiveness of the sign using a passive speed monitoring device.

Afterwards, Simon Fraser University's Rylan Simpson conducted a study on their use.

Simpson, an assistant professor in the university's School of Criminology, looked at the impact of cut-outs deployed on two arterial roads — where traffic often moves from collector roads to regional highways — and on two residential streets.

"Along the arterial routes, we found that the proportion of speeding vehicles was less when the cut-out was present," says Simpson, who notes their use could affect how a police force deploys its human traffic resources in the future.

MacLellan adds road safety has to be a priority.

"We're a fast-growing city and we're always looking to tackle behaviours that lead to collisions so that all road users can be safe." ■

RCMP

The RCMP has been using officer cut-outs positioned at high-risk intersections in British Columbia's Lower Mainland to help improve safety for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians

ROUTINE REMINDERS HELP PREVENT THEFT

By Travis Poland

Kayla Rees, RCMP

RCMP in Nova Scotia post daily 9 p.m. routine reminders on social media.

A little reminder can go a long way.

That's why some RCMP offices have adopted the 9 p.m. Routine, a social media campaign reminding residents to lock their car as night approaches.

"If you form a habit, you'll start to do it automatically," says Cpl. Jennifer Clarke, a public information officer with RCMP in Nova Scotia. "Routinely locking up your things means fewer opportunities for criminals."

Nova Scotia RCMP started the campaign last January to promote crime prevention across the province. Tweets and Facebook posts go out every day at 9 p.m. and are seen around the world.

Since its launch, the Nova Scotia 9 p.m. Routine has developed a loyal following with residents sharing photos of their pets lending a helping hand during the routine.

"It's a nice way for people to interact with police and they like to get involved," says Clarke.

RCMP in Nova Scotia have gone beyond social media, also distributing pamphlets and producing radio messages to raise awareness.

The campaign promotes small steps that can make a big difference when preventing theft.

Locking car doors, keeping valuables out of sight or bringing them inside, and leaving on an outdoor light are easy ways to reduce the risk of theft, but easy to forget after a long day.

The Integrated Municipal Provincial Auto Crime Team (IMPACT) in British Columbia, captained by RCMP Insp. Rob Vermeulen, began promoting the 9 p.m. Routine last spring as part of Auto Crime Enforcement Month.

"For us, it's all about awareness," says Vermeulen. "Keeping your vehicle safe requires a conscious effort from car owners."

When conducting its Bait Car Program, IMPACT routinely encounters people stealing from cars.

"They see things like a phone, a garage door opener or a tablet, and it's like an invitation," says Vermeulen. "Even spare change, unfortunately, can be an invitation."

Florida's Pasco County Sheriff's office launched the 9 p.m. Routine in 2017 and it's since been used by police departments across North America. ■

ANTI-GANG PROGRAM SHOWS SUCCESS OVER TRAGEDY

By Paul Northcott

If there's a glamorous side to gang life, Surrey Gang Enforcement Team Sgt. Mike Sanchez hasn't witnessed it. Now, the team has a new anti-gang message that shows kids a better way.

Sanchez has seen lives ruined and lives end, and has been on a mission for years to show B.C.'s youngest students the damage gangs cause.

Back in 2017, the team launched the program Shattering the Image – Understanding Gangs to address the need for gang-related information.

"We started noticing more young people were showing up as persons of interest in our gang files, some as young as 13, so we wanted to peel back the layers and present the reality of gang life," says Sanchez.

In the first version of Shattering the Image, Sanchez told the story of a student he once worked with who joined a gang and was later killed in a shooting.

But after delivering the presentation to students — and a modified version to teachers — the team of five realized something more was needed.

The team's latest presentation focuses on mentorship and leadership, and includes the story of a successful relationship that Sanchez had with a young student who eventually became a police officer.

"We're now using tragedy and a success story to show kids they don't have to choose gangs," says Sanchez. "It usually has quite an impact."

Sanchez says Surrey faces a unique gang problem because many young people who join are from well-to-do backgrounds and see membership as a way to enhance their prestige.

"Now the gangs are targeting kids with social media and flashy videos," he says. "And those guys in gangs aren't that far removed from high school, so they have contacts and can target people."

In many cases, students with drivers' licences are recruited for basic dial-a-dope operations — where people buy illicit drugs over the phone and young people drive to deliver them.

"If they're caught (by police), they're forgotten about by the gangs, who'll simply try to recruit someone else," says Sanchez.

Sarah McKay is the manager of the Surrey District School Board's Safe Schools Department.

"It's hard to measure impact and prevention but I know it's being well received," says McKay. "And most importantly it sparks a conversation amongst students, staff and parents that I know goes on when the presentation is over." ■

EFFICIENT EVACUATION

RCMP HELPS COMMUNITY AS WILDFIRE APPROACHES

By Travis Poland

In 2018, the small community of Black Sturgeon Falls, Man., fled an approaching wildfire.

Lynn Lake RCMP, located about 35 kilometres away, assisted during the evacuation and credit their relationship with the community for helping it move smoothly.

Lightning started a number of fires in the dense bush near Black Sturgeon Falls, home to the Marcel Colomb First Nation, and about 1,000 kilometres northwest of Winnipeg.

What started as a small fire shifted gears when the wind picked up causing the flames to leap a natural fire barrier and threaten the community.

"It went from a non-threat to a threat in a very short period of time," says RCMP S/Sgt. Kyle McFadyen, who headed the Lynn Lake detachment in 2018.

The province recommended the community evacuate, but news travels more slowly to the remote reserve with limited internet and no cellphone service.

THE RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS

McFadyen drove to Black Sturgeon Falls, met a local band councillor, and explained the situation.

"Having a good rapport helped her trust what I was saying and she took it seriously," says McFayden.

The band council agreed that evacuating was necessary. To spread the news, McFadyen went with the councillor while an RCMP constable paired up with a community Elder, going door to door warning about the fire.

"People took it seriously because of who we paired up with," he says.

"We're familiar with the residents and everyone was very co-operative," says, Cst. Catterina Rios, who works in Lynn Lake and helped during the evacuation.

About 100 people packed into cars, a school bus and police vehicles to make the 20-minute drive to Lynn Lake.

"We used our police vehicles to help evacuate the more vulnerable people, such as the elderly and people with disabilities," says McFadyen.

Lynn Lake couldn't handle the influx of people and the Red Cross stepped in to provide support and buses to Thompson, where residents could be temporarily housed more effectively.

McFadyen credits the good relationship with the community for helping the process move efficiently, taking a little more than an hour to ensure everyone was safe.

"If I was to go in there with a loudspeaker and say 'Hey, you have to get out' it would only lend a small bit of credibility. But by forming partnerships with the right people, there was no resistance to the evacuation," he says.

ON WATCH

While Black Sturgeon Falls was empty for weeks during the evacuation, RCMP officers maintained a security post at the reserve and fed the local dogs that stayed behind.

"Bringing in food and water for the dogs is just a little extra thing we do," says Rios. "The residents appreciate us keeping an eye and watching over the dogs and their homes."

When there's a fire, police work with provincial and municipal partners to keep residents safe. An efficient evacuation clears the way for firefighters to do their work.

"With the majority of residents evacuated in a timely manner, we're able to dedicate our efforts to preparing defences while providing assistance to other local and provincial agencies," says Lynn Lake Fire Department Chief James Lindsay.

Police also work with the fire department to establish checkpoints ensuring no one inadvertently, or purposely, drives toward a fire zone.

"We offer support to the RCMP if they require people to man checkpoints or restrict traffic access to areas where a wildland fire is, or is expected to, encroach on," says Lindsay.

Fire threatened Black Sturgeon Falls again in 2019, and again the RCMP helped with the evacuation process and watched over the community while its residents were safely in Thompson. ■

RCMP

Summer wildfires threatened Black Sturgeon Falls in 2018 and 2019.

DRIVE-IN DETACHMENTS

RCMP OPENS OFFICE IN SOUTH INDIAN LAKE, MAN.

By Travis Poland

A new drive-in detachment model in South Indian Lake, Man. — about 300 kilometres northwest of Thompson — is addressing some of the challenges of remote policing.

A dirt road and a short ferry connect South Indian Lake to Leaf Rapids, which until October, was the nearest RCMP detachment. That drive took at least an hour and a half for officers conducting patrols and responding to service calls.

Now, RCMP have a full-time presence in the small, northern Manitoba community within the O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation.

"Officers won't have to do that drive two, three, four times a day," says S/Sgt. Beryl Lewis with Manitoba North District RCMP. "Instead of driving, they'll be able to sit and do their work or take statements and investigate their files."

Sgt. Eric Descoteaux, who leads the new detachment, says less time on the road will be better for officers.

"The hours of driving can take its toll," he says.

NEW CONNECTIONS

The permanent police presence in South Indian Lake allows officers to build and maintain relationships with the community of about 1,000 people.

"We can now attend a call in minutes," says Descoteaux. "People will be more inclined to call for help when they know it's there."

Instead of the long drive from Leaf Rapids, officers can make it from one side of the community to the other in about 10 minutes.

While the detachment is still new, changes are already being noticed.

"We're getting more calls," says Cst. Gerald McRae, who started in South Indian Lake at the end of summer.

"People are aware of the RCMP presence and that makes a big difference," says Shirley Ducharme, Chief of the O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation. "We're addressing major issues like assaults, violence and impaired driving."

Being in the area permanently opens up opportunities for more positive policing programs.

"We hope to arrange more community and youth outreach once we're well established," says McRae. "So far, the kids have been fans of the temporary tattoos we hand out."

The new police office is welcomed by residents in South Indian Lake.

"They want us there and they're helping us get this up and running," says Lewis. "When we presented this idea to council, the whole roundtable clapped."

The band council collected data on the number of calls, police response time and other details to make a case supporting the new detachment.

"We've been waiting a long time for this. A lot of work has had to happen," says Ducharme." We've worked together and shared a lot of ideas and resources."

When officer housing posed a hurdle for the new office, the community stepped in to provide accommodations until a long-term solution is finalized.

ROTATE AND RECHARGE

Under the new drive-in detachment model, officers work eight days followed by six days off, letting them drive home to larger communities like Thompson. The rotation has officers in the community at all times and includes some overlap to ensure continued operations and services.

"We can recharge the batteries, spend quality time with families, and even have time for a small vacation," says Descoteaux.

"They'll get time off and come in fully rested and effective, which makes a better police officer," adds Lewis.

The RCMP's Leaf Rapids detachment is also transitioning to the drive-in detachment model. Previously, officers lived in the 550-person town while working there.

The drive-in model can benefit all of Manitoba North District RCMP. If there's a critical incident in the region, officers living in Thompson during their time off can help out on overtime.

The new model also aims to make remote policing more attractive to RCMP officers.

"Working in these communities, you're isolated, and it can affect your mental health," says Descoteaux. "The drive-in model will provide more work-life balance."

Serge Gouin, RCMP

Mike Dumas, executive director of the O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation, speaks to RCMP officers who work at the new RCMP detachment in South Indian Lake, Man.

HELP FROM ABOVE

RCMP AIR SERVICES PROVIDES VITAL SUPPORT

By Travis Poland

Serge Gouin, RCMP

The RCMP Air Services provides a crucial connection for officers across the country.

When policing in remote communities, getting there can be a challenge.

The RCMP Air Services aims to make it easier by flying personnel and supplies to and from isolated detachments and providing operational support to front-line officers.

"Air services is a lifeline for many of these communities," says Ashleigh Jamieson, air services co-ordinator for the RCMP in Manitoba.

The planes are generally arranged to take up to six passengers, operational gear and essential supplies to places otherwise accessible only by long drives, winter ice roads or occasional commercial flights.

Piloting one of the RCMP's Pilatus PC-12s, the plane the RCMP uses most often, requires plenty of experience when flying to remote detachments and making stops along the way.

"The flight from Winnipeg to Churchill is nearly 1,000 kilometres and only 25 minutes less than the flight from Winnipeg to Calgary," says S/Cst. Byron Taylor, who's been an RCMP pilot for 14 years and flying for much longer.

Pilots are often landing on gravel or ice-covered runways at airports without any navigational aids, air traffic control services or official weather reporting. They rely on their skills, experience and an intimate knowledge of the area to make decisions and maintain the highest degree of safety.

"Airport resources like snow clearing and runway-condition reports are limited in the North, especially on weekends, but policing never stops," says Taylor.

Some Manitoba detachments, such as Shamattawa, Oxford House and Pukatawagan, have adopted a fly-in detachment model in which officers are flown between the detachment and Winnipeg on a scheduled rotation.

Flights must be carefully planned to consider operational needs, weight restrictions, fuel reserves and pilot duty time. Fuel isn't available at every stop and Transport Canada regulates how long a pilot can be in the air and on duty.

SUPPORTING INVESTIGATIONS

If there's an incident in a remote area, air services supports the investigation by transporting specialized officers and equipment, conducting aerial photography and transporting evidence.

RCMP pilots are special constables and can take custody of evidence for transportation to an officer in a major centre. This maintains the integrity of the investigation throughout the process.

It also helps remote detachments keep officers in the community rather than sending one of its few members away for days.

"It's dynamic work," says Taylor. "We can be flying forensic units to major crimes, responding to calls in remote communities, or looking for missing hunters. It's all based on operational priorities, so you never know."

When police are needed in isolated areas like Lac Brochet or Tadoule Lake, 1,000 kilometres north of Winnipeg, officers fly from Thompson to respond.

While flying officers to detachments and supporting police work makes up the bulk of flights, air services is also used for search and rescue when possible.

"We may bring in officers to assist and if the conditions are suitable, we can use our specialized equipment to try to locate missing people," says Jamieson.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE

It's difficult to get supplies and personal items to remote areas after an officer takes a posting. Friends and family can bring goods to the RCMP hanger and if there's room on the next flight, it'll be sent to the detachment.

And when officers in hard-to-reach areas need to go for training, the RCMP plane helps get them from the distant towns to the training facility.

"I wouldn't want to be doing these isolated spots if it wasn't for air services. They make the isolation not as isolated," says Cpl. Michael Dyck, who leads the RCMP detachment in Churchill, a fly-in community west of Hudson's Bay.

When the Churchill detachment needed exterior lights replaced, Dyck ordered the products from Winnipeg and an RCMP pilot picked them up to bring on the next flight.

"Without air services, our job would be a lot harder, that's for sure," Dyck says. ■

RCMP

RCMP officers and members of the community of Makwa Sahgaiehgan First Nation wore red and marched together in Loon Lake, Sask., to reclaim the colour that local violent gangs have been using to create fear.

HOW CAN POLICE BETTER SERVE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES?

THE PANELLISTS

- **Sgt. Ryan How, detachment commander, RCMP Loon Lake detachment, Sask.**
- **Cst. Chester Williams, Indigenous Policing Services, Merritt detachment, B.C.**
- **Cst. Tayte Goddard, RCMP Stony Rapids detachment, Sask.**
- **Cpl. Charmaine Parenteau, RCMP Recruiting, Yellowknife, N.W.T.**

Every community has its own character and challenges — Indigenous communities are no different. There's never a quick fix or formula to address local problems. We asked four RCMP officers what role they play in improving relationships with Indigenous peoples, making genuine connections and effectively serving their communities.

SGT. RYAN HOW

I've worked in Saskatchewan (F Division) all of my service. And all of that time has been in the North District working and living predominantly in First Nation communities.

I can say without a doubt that any success I've had is due to creating genuine relationships first on a personal level, second as a police officer. Usually the two go hand in hand, but unless we're willing to make personal connections, the "professional officer" role remains one dimensional and ineffective.

Part of creating a genuine relationship is honesty and being able to have difficult discussions with elected officials to define where the RCMP will play a supporting role versus a leadership role. This is unique to every community.

I can't solve the crystal meth epidemic. The front-line RCMP officer can't be expected to be responsible for fixing third-, fourth- or fifth-generation alcoholism and domestic abuse in any community. We can't be everything to everyone. Where I believe the RCMP can take the lead is in making it safe for the majority of the community to stand up against violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and other criminal behaviour.

This is the approach we've taken in the Village of Loon Lake and Makwa Sahgaiehgan First Nation.

Over the past few years, the two neighbouring communities have been terrorized by an extremely violent gang that uses the colour red to intimidate and instil fear — red bandanas, red sawed off firearms, red dyed hair, and so on.

Through some hard and emotional conversations with local leaders, we learned the community was ready to take a stand, but was afraid.

The RCMP made it OK and safe to stand up, and planned a march where everyone would wear the colour red and publicly take away the gang's ability to create fear. On Oct. 1, 2019, more than 350 community members wore red and walked alongside the RCMP in their red tunics. This idea has caught on and spread to neighbouring First Nations, who have held subsequent marches against gang violence.

This is only part of the solution, but is an example of what genuine relationships can accomplish.

Reconciliation has been going on every day in hundreds of communities all over Canada yet it largely goes unnoticed except by the people directly involved. I believe this lack of publicity actually shows that the front-line officers are getting it right and doing incredible work under some difficult circumstances. Reconciliation is truly what RCMP members do every shift.

The RCMP has hundreds of experts in reconciliation working with Indigenous communities who we can learn from. These are, generally, the new officers on their first post creating honest personal relationships with the people they serve. They know that, in isolated areas, they will rely on the community to keep them safe as much as the community relies on them.

We need to continue increasing the supports for these front-line officers and listen to what they have to say to be successful.

CST. CHESTER WILLIAMS

I'm a First Nations officer who joined the RCMP in 1999. My entire service has been with Indigenous communities.

The purpose of the Indigenous Policing Services (IPS) in British Columbia is to lead and bring proactive, culturally sensitive policing to Aboriginal People and the communities in which they live. We strive to improve relations between Aboriginal People, the RCMP and the criminal justice system through a strong and effective Aboriginal policing complement.

The IPS unit oversees, co-ordinates and delivers services under the RCMP's Indigenous Police Program and First Nations Policing Policy to more than 200 Aboriginal communities in B.C.

This includes recruiting, intelligence gathering relating to Aboriginal issues, program development and delivery, and Community Tripartite Agreement negotiations.

I believe that honesty and integrity play a major factor in gaining trust from the communities we police.

Our role as RCMP officers is to provide communities with the resources to correct issues that they may have had, like drug dealers and bootleggers on the reserves.

We provide programs to the community leaders and tools so they can take charge of the issues and begin rectifying them. We want the community members to have ownership over making the reserve healthy for the young people who will one day be our leaders.

In my 20 years of service, there are three excellent initiatives that come to mind.

The first is in Massett, B.C. Each week, RCMP officers offer to pick up people who are living homeless on the reserve and take them to the community hall and feed them a hot lunch and serve them coffee. This has developed a strong sense of trust between the officers and the community members.

Second, in Hazelton, B.C., the RCMP developed a program called Operation Good Deeds. The detachment identifies three young people who are doing exceptionally good work in their community of Gitskan Nation, and fly them to Vancouver for a weekend to attend an NHL hockey game. It's exciting for them as some families don't have the resources to travel far from home.

Finally, the IPS unit in Merritt, B.C., has designed a hood decal for all IPS vehicles. The decals have the crests of the Upper/Lower Nicola/Shackan and Coldwater reserves. When our community members see the decals on the police vehicles, you can see their pride in knowing their crests are being displayed.

We joined the RCMP because we want to make a difference. Under the leadership of Insp. Dee Stewart, IPS helps us as First Nations officers obtain that goal.

CST. TAYTE GODDARD

My experience is based on policing, living and participating in the communities of Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation (MSFN) and Black Lake First Nation in Saskatchewan.

MSFN is a Cree First Nation and Black Lake is home to the Denesuline First Nation. This in itself offers unique social demographics for living and policing, as many traditional, religious and cultural aspects differ between the two. Knowing our communities is important.

RCMP

More than 350 community members from Loon Lake and Makwa Sahgaiehgan First Nation wore red and walked alongside the RCMP in their red tunics in a march against gang violence last October.

As members of the RCMP, we're often thrust into places, cultures and demographics that we're not familiar with. Adapting is a necessity and will dictate our success and job satisfaction.

We must remove our hats as police officers and stand with the communities we serve as participating members. We must contribute.

Through history, the RCMP has had negative impacts on the Indigenous populations in Western Canada. As traditional Indigenous history is an oral recollection, the RCMP's image to our Indigenous communities is often passed down and can be dependent on interactions between people in the past and in present day.

It's important to listen to how members of the community feel towards our officers and policing. Listening to someone explain why they feel or have a specific perception towards something is the biggest step toward respect and reconciliation between our organization and Indigenous communities. Talk is cheap. Saying we are committed to bettering relationships is just rhetoric. Action needs to be shown and practised.

How can we better serve Indigenous communities? Participate in new activities — whether it's a cultural camp to learn how to smoke fish, butchering a moose with youth and Elders, or attending a powwow. Go to meetings with the Chief and council. Most importantly, get involved in community events — not as a police officer, but as the person we are when the uniform comes off.

Indigenous communities rely on trust. RCMP members who establish that will have a much easier time addressing the issues that impact a community, and working with community members towards a solution. Trust gives us the opportunity to speak to people on the same playing field, eye to eye, and in a way that removes the title of police officer. In turn, when someone sees you as a police officer, they can identify a personal relationship to it, which in turn effects the level of trust and respect.

As RCMP officers, we committed ourselves to a job. But we also have a commitment to ourselves as people and community members. We're posted to locations for two, three or maybe five or more years. We need to get out there and participate not just as an RCMP officer, but as a community contributor.

It's a far bigger thing if people remember you by your name and not "that officer" or "the constable." Most communities are small and family oriented. Talk travels fast. Our actions and words may be seen by few, but heard by many.

We must listen and not just hear, and be willing to participate on our personal time. We have maybe 25 years of policing, and time flies. If at the end of the day we can look back and identify one person or community we made a difference to, or positive lasting change in, then our time and efforts are a success.

CPL. CHARMAINE PARENTEAU

I've been a police officer for 15 years. I started working with the Blood Tribe Police Service where I served the Kainai Nation, Treaty 7 land, Blood Indian Reserve 148. I also served Treaty 8 land, which included Driftpile First Nation, Sucker Creek First Nation and Swan River First Nation, all of which are in Alberta.

I'm now posted in Yellowknife, where I serve the entire Northwest Territories as the recruiting officer.

While I've policed and partnered in many diverse communities throughout my service — in townships, metropolitan cities, villages, First Nation reservations and other countries — I've always favored working in and with Indigenous communities. Being Indigenous myself, I'm able to relate to the Indigenous way of life and the issues and problems that some of the communities are facing. I've enjoyed being a part of small positive changes.

My thoughts about how police can better serve Indigenous communities is very clearly identified in the final report of the MMIWG. I will echo the Calls for Justice Section 9 in that final MMIWG report as it speaks volumes in terms of what the future must look like. To be successful in policing Indigenous Peoples, we must know, understand and respect the people we are serving.

I believe the RCMP has embraced these actions in many ways, specifically by educating and providing training to its members about residential schools, inter-generational trauma, reconciliation and healing. That's all part of a very important process to change our way of thinking and to ensure success when it comes to policing and recruiting Indigenous people.

As an organization, we must promote and recruit Indigenous people.

There are many recruiting barriers specific to the territories, some of which are the current prerequisites to apply as a police officer.

This includes having an unrestricted driver's licence. Many of the smaller communities in the Northwest Territories have restricted driver's licences as they don't have the infrastructure to properly practise their driving skills. Some of the restrictions include only being able to drive in those communities.

Despite these challenges, when our applicants have issues with the prerequisites, we work very hard to assist them through the process any way we can. Many of the communities in the Northwest Territories look forward to the day that a community member will be successful in the recruitment process. ■

RCMP

The RCMP must encourage Indigenous applicants to join and help them overcome some of the barriers they face.

RCMP ORGANIZE YOUTH CAMP

TWO DOZEN GIRLS SHARE CANOES, CAMPFIRES AND CULTURE

By Travis Poland

An RCMP-organized camp program is empowering girls from Shamattawa, Man., and building community connections.

For the past two summers, the program has brought a handful of girls from the remote First Nations community 750 kilometers south to a Girl Guides Camp near Winnipeg.

The camp aims to build confidence in the girls from the 1000-person community. Shamattawa has confronted issues such as youth suicide, arson and domestic violence.

"This is all about empowering these girls," says RCMP Sgt. Deb Richard, an officer with the Shamattawa detachment. "We want to give them the confidence not to be victims."

While the stay at the Manitoba Girl Guide's Caddy Lake Camp was the trip's highlight, the girls heard about leadership and self-confidence from a Shamattawa-born air ambulance pilot and Manitoba RCMP's Commanding Officer, Assistant Commissioner Jane MacLatchy.

CREATING CONNECTIONS

Richard visits the Shamattawa school most mornings and still hears fond memories of this year's camp and anticipation for its next edition.

"It has definitely helped engage young people," says Richard, who volunteers with other community youth programs like the Canadian Junior Rangers. "It helps our relationship with the community in general and with our partner agencies."

The camp program is one of the many ways in which the RCMP supports the people and communities where they work.

"As RCMP officers, we love to help and love to lead," says Cpl. Lesley Scramstad, who was a chaperone for the camping trip and has worked in many remote Manitoba detachments. "Community policing is the foundation of all policing."

While camping classics like canoeing, crafts and campfires filled the agenda, the Shamattawa girls had the chance to share their culture with girls from across Manitoba. During meals, they explained Cree words and phrases and talked about what it's like living up North.

"They're resilient girls. We learned as much from them as they did from us," Scramstad says.

RCMP Cst. Julie Cote launched the program last year with funding from the Manitoba Criminal Property Forfeiture Fund, which sees illicit assets redirected to the public good.

In 2018, 15 girls went on the trip. Following that success, 25 girls aged 6 to 15 went to camp last year.

Athena Le Fort-Lynx volunteered to be a mentor on the trip. She recently spent three weeks at the RCMP's Depot training academy completing the Aboriginal Pre-Cadet Training Program and jumped at the chance to volunteer.

"It was an empowering experience," says Le Fort-Lynx. "They're brave young girls."

Gail Francois, another volunteer who completed the Aboriginal Pre-Cadet Training Program, was proud to contribute to the program.

"The girls reminded me of myself when I was younger," says Francois, who grew up on a reserve before moving to Winnipeg at 11.

"I want to be a role model and show the girls there's opportunities to excel," says Francois. "They're ambitious and want to learn skills to help their community."

GROUP EFFORT

Richard says Girl Guides Manitoba went above and beyond when helping with this year's camp.

In March, the Girl Guides announced its campground would be closed for the season, but after some adjustments they were able to open and the girls from Shamattawa were camping with girl guides from all over Manitoba.

"There was some magic on their end and we made it happen," Richard says.

While the program started in Shamattawa, plenty of leg work happened at the RCMP's Manitoba headquarters to make it a success. Staff helped arrange planes, buses and trips like a stop at the Assiniboine Park Zoo.

"We had lots of help from HQ and the people in Contract and Indigenous Policing. This isn't a one-detachment job," says Richard. "It was a positive experience for everybody." ■

RCMP

A group of 25 girls from Shamattawa, Man., made new friends at an RCMP-organized camp last summer.

A SAFE PLACE TO LIVE

COMMUNITY-LED PLANS HELP IMPROVE LIFE FOR FIRST NATIONS

RCMP

The RCMP is one of many local partners who are working with the Esgenoopetitj First Nation in New Brunswick as it develops a local safety plan to improve the lives of its residents.

By Paul Northcott

Many Indigenous communities across Canada, with support from their local RCMP, have launched community safety planning initiatives to help improve the lives of their residents.

For some communities, the work is well underway. For others, including members of the Esgenoopetitj First Nation in New Brunswick, it's relatively new.

In all cases, the RCMP or other local police forces are involved in the initiative along with community partners ranging from health-care officials, schools, youth and Elder representatives, and others. The goal of their work is the same — to create a safe place to live while respecting everyone's culture and specific needs.

"The planning process will help the communities identify risks to safety and develop their own plan to address and improve it," says Supt. Shelly Dupont, the New Brunswick RCMP's Northeast District Commander, who attended an earlier safety planning meeting in 2019. "It's different and effective because it's led by the community."

Kyana Kingbird is the community safety program co-ordinator at Esgenoopetitj, which is also known as Burnt Church.

"We want to make the entire community safer but we really have to look at the deeper issues, deal with them and help people thrive," she says. "We want to work with the RCMP and build a strategy that helps all parts of the community. And part of that is to deal honestly and openly with all our partners."

TAILORED APPROACHES

The project, officially known as the Aboriginal Community Safety Planning Initiative (ACSPI), began in 2010 with the support of Public Safety Canada. It was renewed in 2014 as part of the federal government's Action Plan to Address Family Violence and Violent Crimes against Aboriginal Women and Girls.

By developing a safety plan, Indigenous communities create tailored approaches to address local needs. Core group meetings are held with a facilitator funded by Public Safety Canada to discuss the community's history, its needs and to set priorities. That process continues until the plan is developed.

The first meeting in Esgenoopetitj was held in February 2019.

"It was a two-day workshop and everyone talked and listened," says Dupont, who added the discussion included everything from substance abuse, violence and prostitution, to animal control and the need for more street lights.

Kingbird started her work in July and knows her community faces those problems and others.

She adds it's important to discuss the root causes of the communities' issues.

DIGGING DEEP

Between 1999 and 2002, tempers flared during the Burnt Church Crisis. During that period, community members said they had the right to catch and sell lobster out of season, which resulted in sometimes violent clashes between non-Indigenous and Indigenous fishers.

"The tensions that created have never been relinquished and still need to be mediated," says Kingbird.

There's also the 2009 case of Hilary Bonnell, a 16-year-old girl who disappeared and was later found murdered. Both Bonnell and the man charged and convicted of her murder were members of the Esgenoopetitj First Nation.

"That had a big impact on the community — especially the young people," recalls Kingbird.

She says initiatives to connect youth and Elders with their community's history also need support so both groups don't engage in harmful behaviours.

RCMP Sgt. Pierre Chiasson, who's involved in the safety planning with Esgenoopetitj, says police want to connect with all the partners in a meaningful way.

"We have to begin building those strong relationships because safety planning is crime prevention at its very root," he says.

Kingbird adds that the plan's success can't be measured by a series of checklists.

"We're fully committed to achieving them, but we need to have the entire community feel comfortable and know everyone respected the process." ■

VULNERABLE LIVES

SAFETY TEAM LOOKING FOR THOSE IN NEED

By Paul Northcott

Every day, police officers across Canada see people who are having a tough time.

In Port Alberni, B.C., a specially created unit works to help the most vulnerable — young people, often Indigenous, who are homeless, who may have drug addictions and who could be working in the sex trade.

"We're finding kids who we didn't know existed," says Cst. Beth O'Connor, project lead with the Indigenous Safety Team (IST).

Young people are a big focus of the team's work, but O'Connor says the elderly are on their radar, too.

"We're trying to help as many people as possible," she says. "More and more, elderly people are living alone and they need our attention."

ESCAPING PROBLEMS

Cpl. Jay Donahue, who developed the team, has worked in Port Alberni since 2007.

He explains the program was needed to reduce repeat rates of substance abuse and mental health interventions within the Nuu-chah-nulth community, whose tribal council is based in Port Alberni.

"Port Alberni is a hub for a lot of the First Nations on Vancouver Island," adds O'Connor. "Indigenous People come here to escape whatever problems they have at home and they get involved in street life."

Donahue says it became clear that arresting people wasn't the solution.

"I'm talking about substance abuse, mental health, alcohol and domestic-related incidents that upon release, there was no follow-up or assistance for their specific problems," he says.

Donahue and O'Connor, along with Cst. Pete Batt, now look for people to help, day and night.

"They're going out in the streets and into the woods to find people we can help," says Vina Robinson, Teechuktl (mental health) manager with the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council.

The organization provides services and supports to 14 Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations that have about 10,000 members.

"A lot of young people make camps around the town, and we try to keep track of people who are there and those who need help," says O'Connor.

In November, the team learned about a troubled young Nuu-chah-nulth woman.

"We have strong suspicions she's involved in the sex trade, is homeless and using drugs regularly," says Donahue.

The team works to maintain continual contact and find other resources to help the young woman.

"We hope to get her into treatment," says Donahue. "Sadly, we are also working with her 14-year-old sister."

FINDING HELP FASTER

The idea of starting the IST began in 2018 when Donahue worked with local partners to establish an agreement allowing RCMP officers to make direct referrals to the council's mental health program.

"Within a year of this program, we've had hundreds of referrals," says Donahue. "The next step was establishing the IST and dealing with the highest risk First Nation members in town."

He says front-line workers, like those at the tribal council, are key to helping the most vulnerable in Port Alberni.

"But we needed a quarterback — and that's the IST," he says.

Robinson says partnering with the RCMP has helped those in need obtain services more quickly.

"They can talk to judges, for example, and explain instead of sending someone to jail, they need to be sent for counselling or some other intervention to get them help," she says.

Robinson adds the IST's work is also building trust between the police and the clients.

"They're unbelievably important," she says. "Before, if an RCMP officer approached someone on the street and said they wanted to help, the reaction would be 'Yeah, right.' But Beth (O'Connor) and the others talk to them, get to know them and once the kids find out they're there, they usually say, 'Yeah, I'd like some help.'" ■

RCMP

The RCMP in Port Alberni, B.C., have launched an Indigenous Safety Team to help the city's most vulnerable — whether they live on the streets, in camps or at home alone.

A LINK IN THE COMMUNITY

LIAISON OFFICERS BUILD BRIDGES IN AKWESASNE

By Paul Northcott

While it's the job of RCMP officers to enforce laws, sometimes showing a different side of police work can pay dividends when it comes to community safety.

In eastern Ontario, Cpl. Terry Hamelin is an RCMP liaison officer with the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service (AMPS).

Together, both agencies serve about 15,000 residents in the Haudenosaunee Territory.

"Community policing is about building trust," says Hamelin, a 23-year veteran of general duty policing and a member of Quebec's Timiskaming First Nation. "Akwesasne is a unique policing environment as its boarders are seamless and encompass Quebec, Ontario and New York State."

Hamelin, who is based in Cornwall, Ont., began his liaison duties in August and will work with Cst. Norm King, the Community Policing Officer for AMPS. Among other things, he'll help organize community events and enhance the visibility of the RCMP in the area.

"I'll have the opportunity to meet people and be the face of the RCMP in the community," says Hamelin.

PAST AND PRESENT

Akwesasne faces the kind of issues that are common in many communities across Canada: homicides, assaults, gang violence, drug use, bullying and abuse.

Historically, though, the geographic position of the reserve has led to many well-publicized disputes. Some of those involve the smuggling of alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs and even people.

As well, some Indigenous residents maintain they have the right to move freely across borders.

"People regularly move across the border as people who live there consider the reserve one community," says King. "Our community is so diverse. If you don't understand it, you can't serve it."

Knowing Akwesasne means getting involved with everyone — at schools and public safety events, and with Elders.

That means organizing and planning events for young people around issues such as drug awareness, delivering public safety presentations on topics like child exploitation or human trafficking, and working with the AMPS to deliver that information.

Some events are designed to enhance police presence in the community, such as fishing with kids. Whereas others tackle more serious subjects including information sessions on domestic violence, substance abuse, and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

Both Hamelin and King plan the events together.

"I'm there to liaise and assist if I have the resources to help (the AMPS) and, of course, I want to help," says Hamelin. "The RCMP wants to be involved and learn about the community and the people we serve."

"We rely on the advice of each other to help the community," adds King. "And as a police force, the AMPS wants to help the RCMP learn and understand all they can about Akwesasne."

Both King and Hamelin feel, as Indigenous officers, that building relationships between the public and the police are crucial steps towards reconciliation and healing for all individuals.

SHOWING A DIFFERENT SIDE

One RCMP officer, who's a member of the area's Joint Investigation Team — a group consisting of RCMP, AMPS and Ontario Provincial Police officers — says the work of liaison officers such as Hamelin and King is important "because it shows police in a non-enforcement role."

"It bridges the gap because I've seen how some people don't really want outside police forces on reserve," says the JIT member who can't be named for security reasons.

The officer, who's familiar with Indigenous policing, adds that communicating with First Nation Elders is key.

"Elders are held in high regard in First Nations communities and having their support is crucial. They have a tremendous amount of influence."

"His (Hamelin's) work shows that the RCMP doesn't always show up to bust people. It shows that we're working to be part of the community and to get to know people who live there. They help people see a different side of the police."

RCMP

Organizing school events is just one way RCMP liaison officer Cpl. Terry Hamelin (right) works with Cst. Norm King of the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service to gain a better understanding of the community.

STRONGER FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

ONION LAKE TEEPEE BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER

By Paul Northcott

There's a giant steel teepee in Onion Lake, Sask., that its builders say will strengthen families and help parents get involved in their children's education on the Cree First Nation.

The RCMP funded the project through its Family Violence Initiative which, among other things, supports crime-prevention programs.

The teepee is located on the grounds of the Kihew Wacison Cree Immersion School in Onion Lake, at the main intersection of the community that's often referred to as the Four Directions — a special location in First Nations culture.

People who live in Onion Lake are encouraged to place spoons on the teepee. Each one is engraved with a family name and virtue, such as love, respect, honesty and others, that will be practised at home.

The completed monument will resemble a large wind chime.

RCMP

The RCMP helped fund the construction of a large teepee in Onion Lake, Sask., that its supporters hope will get parents more involved in their children's education.

SENSE OF IDENTITY

Laili Yazdani, the RCMP's community program officer in Onion Lake, hopes the teepee and its spoons will encourage families to work together to create a sense of identity and belonging, and avoid paths that can lead to addictions or crime — which ultimately threaten a family's stability.

Like other communities across Canada, Onion Lake faces drug problems, including methamphetamine, domestic violence, gang activity and other social problems. These issues can lead some young people toward gang life.

"We want to help instil a sense of pride in the community and in families," says Yazdani. "Spoons are in everyone's home and it's an easy way for people to contribute to the teepee and celebrate traditional virtues."

Irene Carter placed a spoon — three actually — on the 10-metre-tall tepee.

They'll hang on metal bars strung around the structure, from top to bottom.

There's room for more than 2,500 spoons.

"We placed one for my family and the families of our two adult children," says Carter, who develops curriculum for the Cree Immersion School.

Carter chose the virtues love and patience.

"You need love to raise a family and patience to endure and survive all the challenges that come with that," says Carter, whose children now have kids of their own. "And we're still practising patience."

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

In December 2017, the project was approved by the chief and council, which also provided funding.

Peggy Harper, a guidance counsellor at Eagleview Comprehensive High School, says many children in the area lack connection to their family.

"Some really want that at home but, when they don't have it, join a gang. Many that do join a gang can get away with it because no one at home is paying attention," she says.

Harper, along with several colleagues and Yazdani, hatched the idea for the teepee in 2017 as a way to get more parents participating in their children's education.

As a residential school survivor — Harper spent seven years in the St. Anthony School in Onion Lake — she's familiar with the struggles of young people who may feel alone or abandoned and the temptations they may face.

"These kids are carrying a lot with them," says Harper. "Then we expect them to come to school. But their lives could be falling apart. Kids can't learn like that. They need more support, especially at home."

The project team hopes to transform the area around the teepee into a park that explains the region's history to future generations.

"Many people don't know how Onion Lake came to be. And we want to tell that story," says Harper, who notes large community celebrations centred around the teepee will take place on each Family Day in Saskatchewan.

In-kind support for the teepee was also provided by the Rural Municipality of Frenchman Butte, Beretta Pipeline Construction and the Onion Lake Lands Department. ■

PAST AND PRESENT

RCMP CADETS LEARNING MORE ABOUT INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCES

By Travis Poland

Cadets at the RCMP's training academy are learning more about Indigenous history, helping them prepare for police work in the present.

The training readies future officers for a career across the country where RCMP detachments serve more than 600 Indigenous communities.

"We're broadening cadets' understanding and giving them a sense of empathy for some of the issues they'll see in their policing activities," says RCMP C/Supt. Tyler Bates, training officer at the academy, known as Depot. "We have cadets from all over Canada and many have never lived in or even visited a First Nations community."

Bates points to examples like the KAIROS blanket exercise, an interactive learning experience providing a sense of how colonization has affected Indigenous people. There are also updated courses incorporating aspects of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls reports.

"We're having discussions about reserves, residential schools, the Indian Act and intergenerational traumas," says Bates. "I'm interested in seeing our organization grow the cultural competency of our members, and I'm encouraged by the changes I see."

INCREASING AWARENESS

Diane Redsky, an expert on sexual exploitation and sex trafficking, recently began giving presentations to cadets. She explains the extent of sex trafficking in Canada and factors that contribute to women in Indigenous and other marginalized communities being at risk.

"It's important to have this education before walking into a community because it's a hidden crime," says Redsky, whose Depot sessions were initiated by the RCMP's Vulnerable Persons Unit in Ottawa. "Learning about it early on means they're walking into communities with their eyes wide open."

Redsky provides information such as sex trafficking warning signs and common misconceptions, and how police can be proactive in rural and isolated communities by hosting discussions with youth and providing information about support services in the nearest urban centre.

"The more you know, the more you can help protect a community," she says.

Communities benefit from having officers with the latest knowledge of the crimes so they can help craft community-based solutions with the most current and accurate information in mind.

"If we provide awareness to members before they leave Depot, and they work with their partners at the detachments, we're going to be making a contribution to the safety of Indigenous communities," says Bates.

OTHER INITIATIVES

The additional course content isn't the only Indigenous initiative underway at Depot. Cadets can now choose to affirm their graduating oath with an Eagle Feather.

"It's removing a barrier for Indigenous cadets to exercise their faith," says Sgt. Eric Sheppard, executive assistant to the commanding officer at Depot.

Cadets can also use the Bible, Qur'an or other holy books to swear or affirm the oaths.

The Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre entrusted the RCMP with the care of three eagle feathers to be used during oath-taking and other situations such as grieving.

Cst. Mason Byrne was among the first to use an Eagle Feather when graduating Depot last September.

"It meant a lot to learn more about my past and help me connect with the people in Hay River," says Byrne, whose first posting sent him the N.W.T. community.

"It would have meant a lot to my late grandmother. She was always big on getting to know our heritage and culture," says Byrne.

Cadets can also use their own feather or one belonging to their family.

"We want to talk about the Eagle Father to encourage understanding. Without sharing these things, they're not understood," says Sheppard, who drafted the Eagle Feather protocol and acts as Depot's Eagle Feather Guardian.

"Instead of having officers learn this on the fly, we're attempting to expose cadets to critical aspects of Indigenous culture before they start working in communities where they will experience these things first hand."

Sheppard says the swearing-in protocol will evolve to incorporate key spiritual components of Inuit and Métis culture. ■

RCMP

Diane Redsky, an expert on sexual exploitation and sex trafficking, gives a presentation to RCMP cadets. She explains factors that contribute to women in Indigenous and other marginalized communities being at risk for trafficking.

A HEALING SPACE

DEPOT SWEAT LODGE SHOWS NEW OFFICERS OLD CUSTOMS

By Travis Poland

A new sweat lodge at Depot, the RCMP's training academy, is giving cadets a chance to become familiar with aspects of Indigenous culture.

Last summer, a troop of cadets helped build a sweat lodge with local Indigenous partners on Depot grounds. They carried fresh-cut willow boughs and firewood under the supervision of an Elder from the Okanese First Nation.

"The whole troop was excited to help," says Cst. Yannick Roy, who worked on the sweat lodge as a cadet. "It was a rewarding experience."

Once the lodge was built and blessed, the cadets participated in a sweat ceremony in the large, 36-person structure.

"They did four rounds in the sweat lodge, which can be difficult," says RCMP Sgt. Eric Sheppard, who works at Depot and chairs the Commanding Officer's Indigenous Advisory Committee. "We had positive feedback from the cadets and the Indigenous community."

Sweat lodges are used by Indigenous communities across the Americas as ceremonial and healing spaces. Water is poured on hot rocks within the lodge filling it with steam providing a physical and emotional experience.

The lodge at Depot provides a familiar setting for Indigenous cadets and an educational opportunity for those unfamiliar with Indigenous culture. Experiences like this are having an effect on the ground.

IN THE FIELD

Roy was new on the job in New Brunswick when he learned about a sweat ceremony following the Indigenous Summer Games. RCMP officers were invited and Roy attended with another officer.

"I wanted to connect with the community," says Roy. "It was another rewarding experience to be able to meet some of the individuals on their reserve."

The Elder conducting the sweat lodge was pleasantly surprised to learn that Roy had helped build a lodge at Depot and appreciated his desire to learn more about the communities where he works.

For Sheppard, it shows that initiatives like Depot's sweat lodge are making a difference.

"It encourages dialogue and sharing personal experiences unique to the diverse backgrounds of today's cadets," he says. "The sweat lodge brings us together as equals and provides an experience celebrating Canada's Indigenous heritage."

The lodge is one of a handful of Indigenous initiatives underway at Depot. Last year, cadets gained the option to affirm their graduating oath using an eagle feather and more Indigenous content was added to policing courses.

Depot's sweat lodge isn't an RCMP first. In 2018, RCMP in Nova Scotia built one at its headquarters and, last year, RCMP in Newfoundland and Labrador did the same.

RCMP officers have historically participated in sweat lodges in the more than 600 Indigenous communities they serve. Depot brings the experiences to its newest members to keep this important part of reconciliation alive. ■

RCMP

A troop of cadets and local Indigenous partners use willow branches to build the frame of a new sweat lodge at the RCMP's training academy.

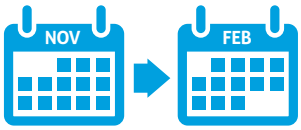
just THE FACTS

WINTER DRIVING

Snow, ice and long, dark nights all pose challenges to those behind the wheel. Whether you operate a car, truck or snowmobile, winter driving requires special attention.

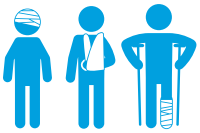
In Canada

In 2017, nearly 30% of collisions happened on wet, snowy or icy roads.



One third of collisions occurred between **November and February**

There were **26,824** collisions in December alone



Of those, more than **14,000** resulted in injury

Road conditions

Snow and ice are more slippery at 0 C than at -20 C or below.

Black ice can be present on roads with temperatures between 4 C and -4 C.

The slick, transparent ice also forms on bridges and overpasses.

Snowmobiles

During the 2017-2018 winter, more than **965 Canadians** were hospitalized with snowmobiling injuries:

77% were adult men

75 children and teenagers were injured while snowmobiling

Wearing a lifejacket or survival suit can save a snowmobiler if they encounter an ice hole or thin ice.

Safety tips

Carry a winter safety kit with the following:

a flash light

emergency food and water

tow straps

booster cables

a shovel and sand for traction

blankets

Install winter tires. They improve traction and shorten stopping distance.

Clear all snow and ice from a vehicle before hitting the road.

Check highway conditions online or by calling 511 before leaving.

Avoid passing a working snow plow as it can be dangerous for both vehicles.

NO REQUEST TOO SMALL

POLICING THE RURAL TOWNS OF CAPE BRETON

By Paul Northcott

Even when they're off the clock, RCMP officers understand that the people they serve still want a few minutes of their time.

It's the same across Canada but especially in smaller detachments like Chéticamp, N.S.

"When you live in a place like this you can't just finish your shift, go home and stay inside," says Cst. Mike Townsend, who also volunteers as a minor hockey coach. "You have to be part of the community. When I go to the grocery store, I know I'm going to have to set aside some time because people are going to want to talk — and that's fine."

TOURIST MECCA

The Chéticamp-based officers, three constables and a corporal, serve dozens of small communities, many of which are located on the historic Cabot Trail, at the edge of Cape Breton Highlands National Park. It's a region that attracts thousands of visitors.

"I get my picture taken now more than ever before, especially if I'm in the red serge," says Townsend, who hails from Truro, N.S. "Tourists love it."

Chéticamp is also a location where cellphone service, or even radio service, can be spotty. That can make keeping in touch a little difficult. When emergency calls come in, the location of the incident could be anywhere from five to 50 minutes away.

Requests for backup can take longer.

"There are no doubt challenges here," says retired Cpl. Paulette Delaney-Smith, who returned to her Cape Breton and Acadian roots in 2010 to serve as district commander for the next six years.

"Working in Chéticamp is not like working at the old RCMP headquarters in Toronto," she says.

Officers' deal with some of the usual requests that are often associated with community policing: traffic calls, domestic disputes, and drug- and alcohol-related offences.

"But when I policed here, sometimes people came in to ask how to fill out forms like passports. Or they had other questions," says Delaney-Smith. "They don't really tell you about that kind of stuff at Depot."

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

Detachment members also help each other — with both day-to-day and more dramatic events.

"In smaller places, where the resources of bigger centres might not be that readily available, you have to do what you can," says Delaney-Smith.

She recalls filling in for officers who needed to travel home on a moment's notice and helping other colleagues who responded to a harrowing call about an injured hiker. The woman had been mauled by a coyote and later died from her injuries.

The incident occurred in October 2009 and Delaney-Smith arrived as the corporal in charge the following year.

"There were several members who responded to that call and some had never witnessed such a traumatic event," she says. "They dealt with it the best way that they knew how."

But the effects came to light many months later.

"I did many extra shifts to allow the officers involved to take time to regroup and process the traumatic event. That's what rural policing is all about."

That philosophy helps build and sustain strong teams, which ultimately allows officers to do their jobs.

It also fits with Cpl. Yannick Gagnon's goals. Gagnon began work as detachment commander at Chéticamp this past summer.

"I think the most interesting part of our job is trying to make someone's worst day better," he says. "When we show up to a call, if we know them, or they've seen us around the community, it's easier to have heart-to-hearts with people and ease the situation."

"When they know who you are, you know you're doing your job right." ■

RCMP officers in Chéticamp, N.S., serve dozens of small communities, some located at the edge of Cape Breton Highlands National Park. The region attracts thousands of visitors.

RCMP

THE EVIDENCE COLLECTORS

FORENSIC EXPERTS MANAGE RISK TO REAP REWARDS

By Paul Northcott

RCMP forensics expert Aaron Dove studied for years so he could investigate crime scenes and collect evidence to help police officers and Crown attorneys find the truth.

"It's an experience you can't get anywhere else," says Dove, a civilian forensic identification member who earned a master's degree in forensic science from England's Staffordshire University in 2007. "Every case is a puzzle to be unravelled using the evidence you find."

S/Sgt. Michael Leben, head of training for the RCMP's Integrated Forensic Identification Services, says there are about 280 forensic identification employees across the country.

Some, such as Dove, are civilian members who join RCMP forensics teams upon their hire. Others are police officers who are later trained in forensics.

"It was always my dream," says retired S/Sgt. Tim Walker, who began working in forensics in 2004 and retired as a divisional manager and senior forensics specialist in New Brunswick in 2019.

Walker has worked on everything from the 1998 Swiss Air crash, to murder scenes and countless other crimes. He says the job is physical and requires focus.

"You're going to be on hands and knees a lot looking for evidence," he says half jokingly. "But you'll need to be meticulous, self-motivated and have good attention to detail."

REALITIES AND RISKS

After about three or four years of general duty policing, Leben says officers interested in forensics usually apply to the Forensic Identification Apprentice Training Program.

"We want the trainees to have a few years of basic policing where they can see and conduct investigative work, and witness forensic specialists at work," says Leben.

Among other skills, participants learn to test and evaluate scientific data, examine crime scenes for physical and chemical trace evidence, produce crime-scene photographs, examine tire prints and footprints, write technical reports and recognize fingerprint patterns.

The training not only helps forensic specialists find evidence, it also keeps them safe when handling dangerous materials such as fentanyl.

"When you hear the stories about the opioid crisis and hear the number of people dying from overdoses, shutting down a fentanyl lab feels like shutting down a weapons factory," says the Montreal-based Dove.

He says the drug is highly toxic and 100 times stronger than morphine.

"So when you go into a lab, or handle the drug, the risks and the challenges are multiplied," says Dove. "You need to treat the situation with respect."

Leben, whose work has taken him overseas, says forensic experts must also adjust to the sometimes gruesome realities of the job.

"Before going into a crime scene, you have to give your mind time to process what you're about to see," he says. "Over time, the scientific mind kicks in and you're focused on discovering what happened."

TESTIFYING AND OTHER TRUTHS

That focus must also extend to the courts, where the forensic expert's work is put to the test by Crown attorneys and defence lawyers.

"It's obviously very stressful," says Walker, who has appeared many times as a witness. "But it's the job of the lawyers to question you. It's your job to know the case and evidence well."

During training, candidates are grilled by senior forensic experts in a mock trial.

"It's challenging," says Walker. "But that's the point — to prepare you for the real thing."

Dove also notes the work is nothing like you'd see on television.

"CSI (crime scene investigation) type shows make it look so simple but it's often much more complicated," says Dove. "But that effort to find an answer is some of the rewarding and challenging work we do." ■

RCMP

RCMP forensic identification officers search for evidence at the site of a 2011 airplane crash in Nunavut that took the lives of 12 people.

MARSHALLING THE MANITOBA MANHUNT

INCIDENT COMMANDER LED EARLY DAYS OF SUSPECT SEARCH

Serge Gouin, RCMP

Supt. Kevin Lewis worked with many specialized RCMP units while co-ordinating the search for two suspects in rural Manitoba.

The search for two B.C. murder suspects, spanning four provinces and capturing international attention, ended with an intense investigation in northern Manitoba. Supt. Kevin Lewis, who oversees RCMP in Manitoba's north district, acted as the initial incident commander co-ordinating police efforts. He spoke to Travis Poland about his role organizing one of the biggest suspect searches Canada's seen.

WHAT MADE THIS SEARCH FOR SUSPECTS A CRITICAL INCIDENT?

The suspects were believed to be responsible for three homicides in British Columbia and a specialized police response was required to protect the public. The suspects had firearms and were last seen in the area of Sundance Creek near Gillam. This increased risks resulting in the need for tactical officers. Once we learned the suspects were in our area, we deployed significant resources to prevent any further losses of life and to locate the suspects.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR ROLE AS INCIDENT COMMANDER.

As the incident commander, I was responsible for the Emergency Response Team and Containment Team, as well as the units supporting them such as the Police Dog Services. At any given time, we had approximately 40 officers on hand in the Gillam area to assist. Managing and prioritizing search tasks and tips was the bulk of my workload.

HOW DID THIS COMPARE TO OTHER CRITICAL INCIDENTS YOU'VE OVERSEEN?

This is by far the most substantial incident I've been involved with. I became an incident commander in 2016, with the majority of calls being armed and barricaded suspects or high-risk warrants. These typical critical incidents last hours or maybe one to two days. This search was much more expansive and exhaustive. Most days in Gillam were long for all our officers and staff and it continued for weeks. The search area was massive, which was unique for a critical incident, where the suspect is usually in a known location.

WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES?

You had to contend with the bugs and they were relentless. Even with insect repellent, it was hard to track through the bogs and dense forests. The search areas were remote and accessible only by helicopter or boat. In addition, there were a number of trappers' cabins where the suspects could easily have accessed food, shelter and firearms. Getting to and searching these remote locations proved to be difficult and high risk for our officers.

HOW DID YOU WORK WITH OTHER AGENCIES LIKE THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES?

The CAF were instrumental in helping us search swaths of northern Manitoba, including the rail lines from Gillam to Churchill, and the coast of Hudson's Bay to the Nelson River. They provided an on-site logistics person in Gillam to ensure timely and steady communication between the air and ground teams. Manitoba Conservation was an excellent partner with their knowledge of the land, hunting cabins and railway sidings and Manitoba Hydro was helpful in providing mapping and information on their facilities and remote locations.

HOW DID YOU WORK WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES?

Gillam and Fox Lake were very inviting during the search. We felt welcomed by the community and some went out of their way to say thank you to our officers. Several locals helped with marine searches and their knowledge of the area was very valuable.

WHEN DID YOU KNOW IT WAS TIME TO SCALE BACK THE SEARCH?

There came a time when the threat the suspects posed began to dwindle. Based on the size and scale of the search, the lack of substantiated sightings anywhere and other factors, we decided to reduce our presence in Gillam. The terrain was harsh and the search was intense, which most likely kept the suspects isolated in the woods with little hope. I like to believe our work limited the distance they could travel. We knew we needed to comb the woods and gather evidence to find the suspects, who we believed at the time likely succumbed to nature. ■

REMEMBERING AND RECONCILING

JOURNAL PUBLICATION HONOURS UNCLE AND INUIT

RCMP

As part of a reconciliation project, Cpl. El Sturko plans to publish a journal kept by her late great-uncle who served in the North. The diary contains photographs and notes highlighting the Inuit and life in the High Arctic.