

# Smiths Falls Police Service



## *An innovative and progressive approach to policing the Rideau*

by Tony Palermo

Located in a triangle between Kingston, Montreal and Ottawa along the banks of the Rideau Canal, the historic Town of Smiths Falls is popular with both Canadian and American visitors. This was especially true this year when the town's 9,000 residents welcomed more than 600 emergency evacuees from Deer Lake First Nation, which was blanketed in thick, heavy smoke from nearby forest fires.

Although home to the OPP's Eastern Ontario Regional Headquarters and regional communications centre, Smiths Falls has its own police agency. With its motto of "community first," the Smiths Falls Police Service (SFPS) echoes the town's people-first approach and community spirit.

"I believe in sending a police car to every call," says chief Larry Hardy. "Every call that comes in to us is important to the person who's reporting it, so we treat it as such."

Although keeping the community safe is

his main priority, he doesn't view the town's boundaries as set in stone. His officers are available to back up nearby police services and deal with criminal activity outside the town.

"I've been called up to bat on that a few times," says Hardy. "Someone will come up to me and say 'I saw one of your cars up on so-and-so road (outside Smiths Falls). What were they doing up there? My answer back is simple. I tell them that the officer was doing their job. Criminals don't have boundaries when they're performing a crime and I don't have boundaries when responding to them.'"

As one of Ontario's longest serving police chiefs (Hardy is in his 39th year of policing, including 28 years as a chief, 22 of them in Smiths Falls) he is still, first and foremost, a community-minded police officer. As time permits, he still patrols the downtown core on foot to engage the public and has no problem responding to calls or backing-up his officers. He cites a case a few years back where he responded to a fight in progress. Hardy laughs as he recalls the Crown's look of confusion while reading the incident report. "Is this right?" the Crown asked, pointing to the part which read "While conducting a routine foot patrol in the downtown core, Chief of Police Larry Hardy responded to a reported fight in progress..."

### **Investing in people and technology**

The SFPS has come a long way from its humble 1854 beginnings when it used

citizen-constables on an as-needed basis. With a current strength of 25 uniformed officers, two part-time special constables for court and escort duties and 10 (seven full-time, three part-time) civilian clerk/dispatchers, it handled 14,072 calls for service last year – a fair amount for a town of 9000 people covering a mere 8.2 km<sup>2</sup>. To help meet this demand, the SFPS thinks outside the box by finding savings where it can and investing wisely in both its people and technology.

As an example, one of its 10 civilians is classified as an administrative assistant and the rest are all cross-trained to perform a combined clerk/dispatcher role. "We're not just clerks, call-takers or dispatchers," notes civilian Betty Anne Small. By cross-training the civilian staff to perform each administrative role, the 27 year veteran notes, resources can be allocated where they're required, providing for a more cost-effective and efficient service.

The SFPS also invests heavily in training its officers and believes in providing them with new skills and opportunities. Many frontline patrol officers have been tasked with additional responsibilities – for example, each patrol officer is assigned to a school as a resource officer. The SFPS also isn't shy about using other skills officers may have. Cst. Cameron Mack learned web design before joining in 2008 so he maintains the SFPS web site and acts as media relations officer – both in addition to his duties on general patrol.

Despite its small size, the SFPS arms its officers with several technological tools. It introduced voice recognition software to in-car laptops in 2010, allowing officers to run voice-activated CPIC queries. Thanks to a 2009 provincial civil remedies grant the SFPS became one of the first services to equip all frontline vehicles with mounted audio/video cameras.

The cameras have proven to be a valuable asset on several fronts, significantly reducing the amount of time (and associated costs) that officers have to spend in court. They also improve officer safety. “When you tell people they’re on video,” says Hardy, “it’s amazing to see how quickly their attitude changes; and if they decide to challenge something, we can always take them back to the car and play the video back for them. This is reality TV at its best.”

**Bargain hunter extraordinaire**

Hardy is known as an innovative, progressive leader who is far from being a little long in the tooth. As one officer notes, “Not only does the chief embrace technology, but he also has an uncanny way of finding bargains and grant money. It’s incredible what he can put together.”

In addition to the voice recognition software and cameras, Hardy managed to get a 2009 Ford F-150 4X4 truck to help officers respond to calls during severe weather conditions and a 2011 Dodge minivan, used as a community services vehicle. Both were purchased with civil remedies grants.

Bargain purchases within the last year include a 2004 former ambulance that the SFPS converted into a crime scene/mobile command unit (purchased for \$1 – a \$29,000 civil remedies grant helped outfit it) and a three-year-old digital radio system purchased from the former Leamington Police Service (a \$700,000 value which the SFPS got for \$125,000 plus the cost of transport and installation).

**Looking to the future**

Though Smiths Falls began using citizen-officers in 1854, the town’s chief constable didn’t start wearing a uniform until 1887, which is recognized as the service’s official birth date. Next year marks the SFPS’s 125th anniversary and plans are underway for several events to help mark the historic milestone.

The SFPS will soon move out of the downtown core and into a new building in a business park on the edge of town. Hardy has long recognized that the service needed more space but hoped for a solution that would allow it to remain downtown. “While I still believe that the downtown area is the first choice for a police station,” he says, “as time moves on, space in this area becomes limited and we have to look in other areas, as we did in this case.”

Hardy still has a few things he wants to accomplish before riding off into the sunset. When asked about his plans to retire, he laughs and responds “when my wife tells me to.”

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*Communications Operator Lenore Willows demonstrates a portion of the new communications system obtained from the now defunct Leamington Police Service in 2010.*



*In a strong showing of community spirit, area schools teamed up with the Smiths Falls Police Service and raised over 1,900 kg of food for the Smiths Falls Food Bank. Top: Students from St. Francis de Sales Catholic School celebrate a job well done with (left) Cst. Chris Coon and (right) Cst. Dave Murphy. Bottom left: After participating in the St. James the Greater Catholic School’s Thanksgiving parade, Sgt. Jodi Empey and Cst. Dave Murphy help students load two minivan’s and a cruiser full of food. Bottom right: In between calls, (left) Cst. Dan King and (right) Cst. Chris Coon help unload the vehicles.*

# A FIGHT FOR LIFE

by Tony Palermo

Cst. Paul Klassen truly understands what it's like to fight for his life.

A 15-year SFPS veteran who previously worked as a Toronto police officer for six years, Klassen, a certified use of force instructor, was taking a domestic assault victim to hospital on New Years Eve 2004. As they passed through the downtown core, the passenger suddenly screamed "That's him!" and pointed towards a male entering a CIBC bank. Klassen steered the car closer and asked if she was sure. "No, that's not him," she replied, but something didn't sit right with the veteran officer.

Klassen decided to check the guy out anyway. He approached the suspect in the exterior lobby of the bank. The suspect lunged, knocking Klassen off balance and sending his radio flying. His heart sank as he watched his radio hit the floor and shatter into pieces. He was alone and the fight was on.

"That was my first mistake," says Klassen. "I didn't book out on my radio. Now, here I was caught up in a fight with this guy and no one knew what was going on, let alone where I was."



Klassen tried everything to gain control of the assailant but nothing seemed to work. The suspect kept smiling, taking everything Klassen was dishing out, all the while saying that he would kill him. After a long struggle, Klassen managed to get the suspect in a choke hold but he reached for Klassen's sidearm. While trying to protect his gun, Klassen lost control of the assailant and found himself on the receiving end of a choke hold. Protecting his sidearm and unable to break free, Klassen felt himself starting to black out.

"This is the first time I was really scared

that things might not turn out so well," says Klassen. "We were both fighting hard – fighting dirty. I was literally fighting for my life."

Klassen doesn't remember how he did it but somehow managed to break free and continue fighting. Moments later, other officers rushed through the door and helped control the suspect.

Aside from some scrapes and bruises, Klassen ended up with a broken nose, which he believes happened when the suspect hit his face and tried to gouge his eyes out. It turns out that before losing his radio, he managed to get off a partial transmission, albeit almost unintelligible. While the other units were frantically looking for him, the dispatcher kept replaying the transmission over until she made out what sounded like "CIBC."

"They say it goes down in slow motion, but I don't know," says Klassen. "It was really hard to think through it. Just as fast as I was thinking, stuff was happening. I use this scenario and show the bank video footage when I'm training other officers. I'm not just the guy who's at the front preaching. I'm the guy giving a lesson learned and showing them how, because of a mistake, I almost got my ass handed to me."

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