



## “OPP Employees and Volunteerism”

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Presented by **Deputy Commissioner Chris Lewis**

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Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon and thank you for inviting me to address you here today.

I'm pleased to be able to speak to you on 2 issues this afternoon, a career in the public service as an OPP employee, and “volunteerism”. These 2 issues are greatly linked, as police officers faithfully serve their communities and communities cannot exist without volunteers.

As a young man in Sault Ste. Marie that started a career sailing on the Great Lakes and hoped to someday be the Captain of a ship, I had no idea whatsoever of where an OPP career would bring me or what I would see or do along the way. The opportunities have been endless for me. Its proven to me that if you're honest, work hard, commit yourself and do all you can to develop, the sky is the limit in a policing career.

In 1978, I joined one of North America's largest deployed police services that welcomed me with open arms. We currently operate out 165 detachments, 6 Regional Headquarters, our general Headquarters and other deployed offices around Ontario.

The OPP has provided me an exciting, challenging and rewarding profession.

As we've said many times throughout this our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, Our traditions are rich; our pride runs deep.

From day one in the OPP, the ball was in my court to be one of the very best Provincial Constables in our history; or to move into one of the many specialty Bureaus, and/or to seek promotion - as I so chose. Although I wasn't completely sure what laid ahead for me, I knew I had made the right decision to become a police officer and to join the OPP. Over 31 years later, I have absolutely no regrets in those decisions.

The OPP has offered me no end of career possibilities: from exciting uniform postings; to challenging special assignments; to the development of cherished relationships with many wonderful community members and the broader law enforcement community across Ontario and elsewhere.

The OPP has given me the opportunity to provide security to the Pope; to the Queen of England and to all of her children at different times; as well as to Canadian Prime Ministers; US Presidents; world leaders; and many others.

A career in policing has allowed me to comfort victims; interview witnesses, interrogate killers; track and arrest criminals; and to do my part in ensuring the safety and security of communities, highways, waterways and trails.

What other career and agency can offer you the ability to change career paths a dozen times and to live in many different communities without having to leave the one organization?

Where else can you have a thirty year plus career that allows you international policing opportunities?

You may be wondering what it takes to be a member of the OPP team. It takes people with integrity, accountability, courage, caring and fairness. It takes people from diverse backgrounds to represent the communities we serve. It takes people who enjoy working with others and want to build strong, positive relationships characterized by mutual respect in all types of settings and circumstances - people who really want to make a difference in the lives of others.

It takes leaders. People who want to give to and work with the community.

Because the OPP doesn't police the community, we police WITH the community.

The OPP is also not only comprised of police officers who carry guns. Policing is a team effort. We are blessed in the OPP to have over 8,700 employees, including almost six-thousand uniformed members and cadets, more than 26-hundred civilians, as well as 850 auxiliary members and many other volunteers.

Our OPP Auxiliary is second to one, anywhere. We treasure their contribution to what we do as an organization. We get tremendous recruits from within the Auxiliary.

Since our humble beginnings in 1909, the OPP and the communities it polices, have always been blessed with the support of community members.

As we evolved as an organization, the demands for volunteer support ever increased and the members of our communities rose to the occasion and responded to assist.

Almost 50 years ago, the OPP Auxiliary was formed and has become one of the biggest and undoubtedly the greatest police auxiliary program anywhere in the world. Many of its members provide volunteer hours that equal or surpass the hours worked by full-time employees.

Most of our Auxiliary members have full-time jobs and young families, but still give hundreds of hours of their time to the each year, supporting us and their communities. We cannot thank them enough for that and could never meet all of our policing responsibilities without that dedication.

The OPP is also fortunate enough to receive dedicated support from hundreds and hundreds of other volunteers.

I cannot name all of the groups involved in this support, but they assist us in our detachments by staffing our Extended Services Offices, supporting and in many cases "managing" programs that provide valuable assistance to victims, as well as assisting with patrols, on land and water and community event support. I often wonder - who would do all of this work if these dedicated folks didn't do it?

They are indeed an important part of our OPP "TEAM" across this province. They make us a better organization. They are true leaders; they make our communities stronger, better and safer places to live and work. We owe them an enormous debt of gratitude for that.

In the OPP we give in many ways. We give our all to our communities to keep them safe; we give support to each other as we work hard to achieve our professional goals; we also give tickets.....and lots of them!

In all seriousness, our collective giving and the good deeds all of us do on duty and off, matter greatly to many people in our communities.

No matter what we do in life, as an employee, or student, as a police officer or as a civilian, not a day goes by that we don't all hear news of people losing their jobs, some right here in this community.

One can't help but think about the hardships that lay ahead for these people and their families.

And the sad reality is that there are many families with hardships far over and above those who are unemployed.

In policing, we are at the fore-front of seeing and meeting such people every day as we do what we do to keep communities safe.

Families who can't feed their children. Families battling illness, abuse and or addictions.

Families with special needs whom, without the help we can provide through our donated time and money, might not have access to important programs and services to help them be healthy, happy members of our communities.

Unfortunately not everyone in society has the benefits and the support mechanisms to help them when they most need that help and support.....when the chips are down.

Every year, there are enough hardships among people living in Greater Simcoe County, to fill an entire book with their stories.

A book of very sad stories involving children, teenagers, needy adults, senior citizens and many very vulnerable people.

As community members, we have a responsibility in my view to ensure everyone has an equal opportunity, where our homeless can find shelter, where no one has to go hungry.

These are all gifts that can and will change our communities in such a positive way.

The United Way of Greater Simcoe County has for 50 years supported many programs that bring help, hope and a future to so many people that are in need. Some of these people may be friends or family of each and everyone of us. Maybe some of the very people that are with us in this room.

I recently heard a touching story of a young man who emigrated from Afghanistan with his young wife and settled in Toronto. His English was poor, but he struggled to learn and worked in construction so he could afford to raise a family.

When his first child was born he took a week off work so he could stay home and help his wife with the baby. On his first day back to work he was laid off. He and his wife struggled desperately as he tried to find employment.

He turned to the United Way sponsored programs to support him and his family and to help him get what they needed to survive as he took whatever jobs he could to make ends meet.

I'm proud to say that that young man is now a uniformed police officer and a member of the OPP in the Greater Toronto Area.

You know, after over 31 years in the OPP, I'm still learning each and every day, and I learn from all of those around me. Learning is a life-long journey regardless of what vocation you choose. So is giving.

As an organization and as individuals, we all continually give. We purposely hire community minded people; we nurture and develop our people to grow as community minded volunteers, and public servants. We want to hire people who are leaders and those with leadership ability.

And we continually encourage them to give – as a part of our fund-raising and giving endeavors and as individuals.

It is often said that true “Leaders” do the right things for the right reasons. Not for themselves, but to benefit others, include those they have the honour to lead.

It is also said that “leaders are not born leaders, they volunteer to become leaders”.

I encourage all of you to be leaders in your community. And as leaders, I encourage you to give. Give to your community; and give to those in need. You can do that during a career serving the public in policing AND you can do it by supporting the United Way of Greater Simcoe County.

Thank you for being here today; thank you for allowing me an opportunity to address you.

I wish you all the best of luck and success in your lives and careers and as you give to others along that long, healthy and fulfilling journey.

Thank you.