

BLUE LINE NEWSWEEK

A CHRONICLE OF NEWS FOR THE CANADIAN LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMUNITY  December 28, 2012 – Vol. 17 No. 52

Executive Digest



HAPPY NEW YEAR!!

Dec 21 2012

OTTAWA - Now that an RCMP criminal probe into allegations against them has ended without charges, Pembroke's police chief and deputy chief are returning fire over how the 10-month investigation was conducted.

Page 3

Dec 21 2012

EDMONTON - Alberta's police chiefs are pressing the province to hand out demerits for distracted driving tickets.

Page 4

Dec 21 2012

OTTAWA - The Supreme Court of Canada has dismissed the appeals of five people who raised concerns about jury-vetting by police.

Page 4

Dec 23 2012

OTTAWA, Ont. - A major new study on how much spousal violence costs Canadian society puts the price tag at more than \$7 billion for just one year.

Page 5

Dec 26 2012

EDMONTON - A man accused of shooting at Edmonton police and holding RCMP at bay in a rural motel faces 31 criminal charges, with more pending.

Page 6

Dec 27 2012

ORILLIA - During the early months of 2012 citizens from across Ontario were randomly selected and surveyed about OPP services.

Page 6

BLUE LINE NEWSWEEK

EMAILED EVERY WEEK

52 WEEKS - ONLY \$100⁰⁰

www.BlueLine.ca/Shop

Mandatory minimums may face tough year in courts



Dec 21 2012

TORONTO - The coming year could bring some clarity to the murky legal waters of the federal Conservatives' law-and-order agenda, particularly mandatory minimum sentences, even as new complications are added to the mix.

One of the government's omnibus crime bills churned through the courts in 2012, with several planks falling victim to declarations of unconstitutionality. Meanwhile, a new slew of provisions entered the fray in the form of a second omnibus bill.

Major players in the legal community are predicting 2013 will bring even more questions

about the constitutional validity of the two bills, both heavy on mandatory minimum penalties and tougher rules for violent offenders.

But at least some of the questions already raised will be answered by Ontario's highest court early next year as it is set to convene a special five-judge panel for February to rule on mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes.

Several different judges in Ontario this year had to consider the constitutionality of those firearm laws. Their differing decisions left a fragmented landscape. Hearing six of those cases at the same time gives the Court



TRADE SHOW • TRAINING • AWARDS DINNER

APRIL 23 & 24

LE PARC CONFERENCE CENTRE, MARKHAM ON

www.blueline.ca/expo

of Appeal for Ontario the opportunity to deliver a uniform ruling.

The mandatory minimums were upheld in most of the cases the panel will hear. The case in which the law was struck down is that of Leroy Smickle - a man who very well demonstrates the problems with the legislation, said his lawyer.

The "very foolish" Smickle was alone in his boxers in his cousin's apartment posing with a loaded handgun while taking pictures of himself to post on his Facebook page, the judge found.

Unbeknownst to him, members of the Toronto police Emergency Task Force were amassing outside to execute a search warrant in relation to Smickle's cousin, who they believed had illegal firearms. Smickle was caught red handed.

Ontario Superior Court Judge Anne Molloy convicted Smickle of possessing a loaded illegal gun, but found that sending the first-time offender to prison for three years was cruel and unusual punishment. She struck down the mandatory minimum, declaring it unconstitutional.

The government is appealing, and at the special hearing in February both federal and provincial Crowns are set to make arguments.

The Department of Justice said no one was available for an interview, and sent a statement touting its tough-on-crime agenda.

But critics of mandatory minimum sentences say they don't actually help reduce crime and do more harm than good.

"In terms of reducing crime they're usually thought of as having a possible general deterrent effect," said Anthony Doob, a criminology professor at the University of Toronto.

"There's been so much research on this that I don't think that's really a question anymore. Anybody who looks seriously at the effect of mandatory minimums...would

know that they're not going to reduce crime in that way."

Having mandatory minimum sentences means more people will end up in prison, and putting a first-time offender through the paces of prison culture can leave them at the end of their sentence more likely to re-offend, Doob suggested.

"So what you may be doing in these circumstances... is in the long term an increase in crime," he said.

Mandatory minimums are nothing new - both Liberal and Conservative governments have enacted them. Commissions looking at the issue going back several decades have called for mandatory minimums to be abolished.

Court decisions striking them down aren't new either. One of the biggest cases was from 1987, when the Supreme Court of Canada struck down a seven-year minimum sentence for importing a narcotic.

But this year saw a torrent of new legal challenges as the provisions from the 2008 legislation finally made their way through the backlog of the courts.

And those court delays will only get worse with the flood of new mandatory minimums, suggested Rick Woodburn, the president of the Canadian Association of Crown Counsel.

He wouldn't comment on the validity of the legislation, but said "a bill like this increases the workload."

Crowns typically offer plea bargains with conditional sentences to less serious offenders, but with more lenient sentences for certain crimes gone, guilty pleas - which save court time and resources - are drying up, Woodburn said.

"We're seeing that the delays are starting to get longer and longer in a very short period of time. There's no coincidence that delays across the country can be directly linked to the omnibus bill."

Another frequent criticism is that mandatory minimums strip discretion from judges, who know all the facts of a case and are the best equipped to determine an appropriate sentence. It's a blunt instrument to deal with a complex problem, said Smickle's lawyer, Dirk Derstine.

"Our judges know perfectly well that possession of firearms is a very, very serious thing," he said. "Really, what this indicates is a lack of trust in the judiciary."

Derstine also represents Hussein Nur in another case that will go before the Appeal Court panel in February. In that case, which came a few months before the Smickle decision was issued, the trial judge found merit to the constitutional challenge, but dismissed it.

Superior Court Judge Michael Code found that there were many circumstances in which a three-year sentence could end up being cruel and unusual, such as in the case of John Snobelen, a former Ontario cabinet minister who never got around to registering a gun in Canada after buying it among the

contents of a ranch in the U.S. His wife told police about its existence during marital difficulties.

But the judge said the Crown, as it did in the Snobelen case, can decide to proceed to a summary conviction, which is treated less seriously and with less jail time than indictable offences. Snobelen was granted an absolute discharge.

That option in the firearms offence saves the law from being declared unconstitutional, Code said. But, he warned, "one unwise Crown election" may invalidate the whole sentencing scheme.

Nur also argued that the difference in penalties for summary conviction and indictment is arbitrary and Code agreed.

The government raised the mandatory minimum sentence for possession of a loaded prohibited firearm from one year to three years as part of the 2008 omnibus bill. But it didn't change the sentencing options for the same charge under a summary conviction.

The maximum sentence on a summary conviction for the crime remained one year. That has left a two-year gap that "makes no rational sense," Code said. It appears as though it happened by mere oversight, not by some advertent decision, he said.

He found that Nur's charter challenge of arbitrariness had merit, saying the gap "emasculates" the sentencing provisions and "will inevitably lead to unfit sentences" for less serious firearm cases. But Code found that he had to dismiss the challenge on a technicality.

In Quebec, the provincial bar association launched a legal challenge last month seeking to strike down sections of the 2012 omnibus bill involving mandatory minimums. The bar association said mandatory minimums don't protect the public and represent an unconstitutional interference from one branch of government, the legislature, in the business of another, the judiciary.

There will be more challenges to the new sentencing laws in the new year, professors, lawyers and other legal experts predict.

University of Ottawa professor Carissima Mathen suggested that minimum sentences for some drug laws that came into effect this year are vulnerable.

Some experts say the new provisions mean that someone growing six marijuana plants in their own home could be sentenced to six months, but a person growing the same amount in a rental unit could get nine months.

Enacting mandatory minimums is an easy way to appear tough on crime, critics say.

"The reality is, if you don't care about sentencing policy but want to show some activity...you can pick a random offence and give it a mandatory minimum," Doob said.

Many of the constitutional challenges, including the one being heard en masse in Ontario in February, are expected to eventually be heard by the Supreme Court of Canada.

BLUE LINE NEWSWEEK
A CHRONICLE OF NEWS FOR THE CANADIAN LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMUNITY

ISSN 1704-3913
Copyright 2012
Blue Line Magazine Inc. & The Canadian Press
Permission to reprint may be obtained in advance from
Access Copyright
Phone 1-800-893-5777 Info@accesscopyright.ca

Published weekly by Blue Line Magazine, Inc. as an executive news briefing service to Canada's top level law enforcement personnel.

Most information supplied in this publication is from newswire services. As such Blue Line Magazine does not accept responsibility for the accuracy of articles as supplied.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in an electronic database or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers. One Year Subscriptions are \$105⁹⁹ (GST Included). Paid subscribers may make up to four (4) copies of this publication for distribution within their organization.

GROUP PUBLISHER: Morley S. Lymburner
PUBLISHER: Kathryn M. Lymburner B.A. - Kathryn@BlueLine.ca
NEWS EDITOR: Mark Reesor - News@BlueLine.ca
SUBSCRIPTIONS: Blue Line Store at www.BlueLine.ca
ADVERTISING: 1-888-640-3048

12A-4981 Hwy. 7 East, Ste. 254, Markham ON L3R 1N1
Phone: 905 640-3048 eMail: news@blueine.ca

THURSDAY

DECEMBER 20, 2012

Dec 20 2012

TORONTO - Journalists and lawyers will now be able to tweet in Ontario superior court, but it seems members of the general public won't be able to except in certain cases.

The court has issued a policy on tweets, one of the last provinces to do so.

It says electronic devices in silent mode can be used discreetly in courtrooms by counsel and journalists to transmit "publicly accessible live communications."

A judge can order otherwise in any given case.

But members of the public can't tweet unless the judge hearing a case gives permission.

It's unclear how it will be determined who is a journalist and who is a member of the public.

BC and Saskatchewan both brought in new policies last month allowing "accredited journalists" and lawyers to use electronic devices in trial courts.

FRIDAY

DECEMBER 21, 2012

Dec 21 2012

OTTAWA - Now that an RCMP criminal probe into allegations against them has ended without charges, Pembroke's

police chief and deputy chief are returning fire over how the 10-month investigation was conducted.

In interviews Friday, Chief Dave Hawkins and Deputy Chief John "Drew" Mellon decried the length of the investigation, the RCMP's unwillingness to tell them what it was about and the disrespectful way they were treated by investigators.

Hawkins said the RCMP — which took on the investigation at the request of the Ontario Provincial Police last April — "refused to give me any particulars as to what they were investigating. To this day, we have never been told specifics of what I was to have done."

It wasn't until Oct. 19, when Hawkins and his lawyer, Ian Johnstone, met in Ottawa with RCMP investigator Corey Carlisle, that the chief first learned the allegations related to an untendered contract for emergency cell repairs at Pembroke's police station in 2008.

The repairs had been ordered by the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services after an audit raised health and safety concerns.

When Pembroke's public works department was unable to do the work, Hawkins approached Donald Saar, a lifelong friend who had the necessary equipment. According to an invoice provided to investigators, the repairs were done over two days and cost \$1,440 plus GST.

At the Ottawa meeting, Carlisle told Hawkins and Mellon he'd called various welders in Ottawa and was told their rates were between \$75 and \$125 per hour, Johnstone said.

Based on its estimate of 10 hours' work, that meant the RCMP believed that Hawkins had paid Saar \$190 too much for the job, he said.

But Johnstone called the RCMP estimate an "apples and oranges" comparison. The work done by Saar involved two workers and a total of 16 man-hours of work, as well as painting and the use of specialized equipment.

Moreover, payment of the bill was approved by Pembroke's police services board and city council, he said. "It's not like any of this is hidden."

Johnstone noted that the OPP has deemed Pembroke's existing police station unsuitable and is spending \$5 million to purchase and renovate another building.

Meanwhile, Hawkins and Mellon have been dragged through the mud for allegedly overspending on "minor, minor repairs," he said. "If this isn't ludicrous, I don't know what is."

At the Oct. 19 meeting, Hawkins said Carlisle asked him if he'd "incorporated anything into the bill." The implication, Hawkins said, was that the RCMP believed he had inflated the bill and pocketed some of the payment for personal use.

However, the investigating officer refused to elaborate. "If you're going to allege that I got something out of that bill, then tell me what it was and how I got it," Hawkins said.

Hawkins, who described the allegations against him and Mellon as a "smear campaign," said he found it "difficult to comprehend that any type of credibility would have been given to this complaint."



The *Police Leadership Award* recognizes and encourages a standard of excellence that exemplifies leadership as "an activity not a position," and pride in service to the public. Its goal is to increase effectiveness, influence, and quality of police situational leadership from both an organization and community perspective.

This award is open to active Canadian police officers below the rank of senior officer who have demonstrated exemplary leadership and commitment to service through deeds resulting in a measurable benefit to their peers, service and community.

The 2012 award recipient will be recognized in the May 2013 issue of *Blue Line Magazine* and will receive the award at a presentation held in conjunction with the *Blue Line Expo*, April 23, 2013.

Questions?
Email: Leadership@blueline.ca

Application forms at
www.blueline.ca/Leadership

Applications for 2012 must be received by February 12, 2013 and emailed to Leadership@BlueLine.ca

He also expressed dismay at the length of the investigation. "I can't for the life of me imagine why it has taken this long. I don't know if that's par for the way the RCMP operate. I know certainly that municipal and OPP services in Ontario don't operate that way."

Despite an unblemished 34-year record of police service, Hawkins said he was treated disrespectfully by the RCMP investigators. "That's what really boils my blood, the lack of respect as to how we were treated."

Though Hawkins said it was a relief that the "veil of suspicion" had been lifted, both he and Mellon were unhappy with the wording of the RCMP's Dec. 4 letter informing the OPP that the investigation had ended.

In the letter, Gilles Michaud, commanding officer of the RCMP's A Division in Ottawa, wrote that there was "insufficient evidence to support criminal charges at this time."

Hawkins called the "insufficient evidence" explanation "a back-door out" for the RCMP, while Johnstone said it was "appalling" that the RCMP used that phrase. "What are you talking about?" he said. "There's no evidence. There's nothing."

Mellon — whom the RCMP declined to interview during their investigation — said the letter's wording suggests the RCMP had "some sort of evidence. Why wasn't I given a chance to respond to the allegations against me?"

"I am no further ahead today than I was when I was advised in the media that I, along with Chief Hawkins, were the subjects of a criminal investigation," Mellon said, adding that the ordeal "has affected my wellness and the wellness of those close to me."

Hawkins echoed that, saying the lengthy RCMP investigation "has without doubt negatively impacted not only my well-being and social lifestyle, but also those of my wife and immediate family."

Hawkins said it was "imperative that the persons who initiated this smear campaign are now held accountable in the eyes of our community."

Johnstone said the two officers will take civil action against those responsible for the "false allegations" against them. Any police officers involved could also face charges under the Police Act for violating their code of conduct, he said.

In October, Johnstone issued a statement accusing Const. Shawn Piercey, a suspended Pembroke police officer who had just pleaded guilty to discreditable conduct, of bringing the allegations against the two officers.

Piercey has been under suspension since April 4, 2010, when he got into a late-night drunken brawl at the Irving Big Stop truckers' diner. He was later convicted of impaired driving, fined \$1,200 and prohibited from driving for one year. He was also convicted of causing a public disturbance but received an absolute discharge.

The OPP asked the RCMP to investigate the allegations against Hawkins and Mellon to avoid any possible conflict of interest. Pembroke city council voted in March to disband the 134-year-old municipal police service and purchase policing from the OPP instead.

The decision is subject to provincial approval after public consultations. A hearing on the proposed disbandment will take place Jan. 8 in Pembroke.

(Ottawa Citizen)

Dec 21 2012

EDMONTON - Alberta's police chiefs are pressing the province to hand out demerits for distracted driving tickets.



Edmonton police Chief Rod Knecht says the association representing the chiefs has approved a resolution that's now on the desk of the Solicitor General.

Knecht says people just don't seem to be paying much attention to the distracted driving laws, and the chiefs think handing out demerits might change that.

He says police forces are getting a lot of complaints about how people are still using their cell phones while driving and the police aren't doing enough about it.

Knecht says he himself noticed that drivers seemed a bit more alert to their surroundings in the first weeks of the legislation.

But now he says he's seen a lot of people are back to texting or calling people on their cell phones.

The chiefs would like to see two demerits attached to each ticket.

"You're looking for the people who are the frequent flyers who are doing it over and over again as opposed to that single individual."

"It's the normal course of doing business. Traffic's heavy, people are bored and they'll reach over and pick up that cell phone or that Blackberry and text."

Knecht expects a response some time early in the new year.

(CHED)

Dec 21 2012

PHOENIX - Officials in the U.S. say detectives have arrested a 16-year-old female student and foiled an Arizona school shooting plot with the help of Toronto police.

The Maricopa County Sheriff's Office says the girl's threat was posted on a YouTube channel owned by a transgender community in Toronto.

The owner of the channel contacted Toronto police who then tracked down the teen who had plans to gun down her schoolmates at Red Mountain High and kill herself.

According to Sheriff Joe Arpaio, U.S. detectives acted within hours of being alerted by officers in Toronto on Wednesday and visited the girl's home in Mesa, Ariz., some 32 kilometres from Phoenix. Police say the girl was arrested

after she admitted posting the threat.

They say the teen told officers she planned the attack well ahead of last Friday's school massacre in Connecticut, where 20 young children and six adults died in a shooting rampage.

Dec 21 2012

OTTAWA - The Supreme Court of Canada has dismissed the appeals of five people who raised concerns about jury-vetting by police.

The high court said in three unanimous decisions today that all five had fair trials and there was no miscarriage of justice.

The cases stemmed from revelations that Crown attorneys were asking police in Barrie, Ont., to run background checks on potential jurors to see if they had criminal backgrounds or were otherwise "disreputable persons."

The Crown sought advice from police over the suitability of prospective jurors, including any potential bias.

Those opinions were not always disclosed to defence lawyers.

In a series of rulings, the Supreme Court says while the Crown shouldn't have asked police to run jurors through databases, doing so did not affect the fairness of the trials.

Dec 21 2012

SURREY, B.C. - B.C.'s police watchdog says RCMP officers who tried to stop a prohibited driver in Langley, B.C., didn't commit any offences when the driver fled and his truck was involved in a deadly crash.

The Independent Investigations Office was called in to investigate the incident, which occurred on Oct. 29 when RCMP traffic officers checking license plates spotted the truck and linked it to a person who'd been banned from driving.

Officers tried to stop the truck, but it sped away and a few minutes later it collided with two other vehicles.

A 47-year-old man who was driving one of the other vehicles was killed in the crash.

In a report released Friday, the IIO Director Richard Rosenthal says there is no evidence any police officer involved in the incident committed an offence related to the death.

Dec 21 2012

HALIFAX - Nova Scotia's Serious Incident Response Team has launched an investigation after a man's ribs were fractured during an arrest by the Halifax police.

The agency says that on Dec. 15, police stopped a car on Chappell Street and arrested a 47-year-old man on an outstanding warrant.

There was a physical struggle between the man and police officers, and three days the man arrested was diagnosed with rib fractures.

After receiving this information, the man contacted the review team to ask for an inquiry, and an investigation began Friday.

Dec 21 2012

VANCOUVER - Vancouver police have

recommended charges against another 40 people in connection with the June 2011 Stanley Cup riot in downtown Vancouver and say that after 18 months of investigation, they are still sorting through evidence.

Insp. Laurence Rankin told a news conference Friday that the length of time the investigation has taken so far is an indication of how complex it's been.

"Even after a year and a half, we're still sifting through hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of video," Rankin said.

"We didn't have a game book to follow. I think what we've learned is a legacy."

Rankin said the investigation has, among other things, helped the department develop a cutting-edge forensic video unit and it can now adapt the investigative techniques it has learned to other investigations.

The charges announced Friday are the 10th round of charges police have announced and they include eight counts of assault and nine counts of arson.

In total, more than 1,000 charges have been laid against 315 people, Rankin said, noting police are still looking at additional suspects from the mayhem that saw mobs smash windows, burn cars and loot stores after the Canucks lost Game 7 of The Stanley Cup final to the Boston Bruins.

Dec 21 2012

WINNIPEG - The head of the Manitoba Hells Angels will not be going home for the holidays.

Dale Sweeney was denied bail Friday by Queen's Bench Justice Chris Martin.

A court-ordered ban prevents specific details of the case from being published.

Sweeney, 41, has been in custody since March 2012 following his arrest as part of a major undercover police project.

Police seized an estimated two kilograms of cocaine and an undisclosed amount of cash, laying charges including trafficking, proceeds of crime and money laundering.

(Winnipeg Free Press)

**SATURDAY
DECEMBER 22, 2012**

Dec 22 2012

WINNIPEG - A Winnipeg anti-traffic-ticket activist wants to know what the city thinks of him, but he says he's not willing to pay half a million dollars to find out.

Todd Dube of Wise Up Winnipeg recently filed a freedom of information request with the city asking to see all memos and emails that mention his name or the group's name.

He was told in a letter from Colleen Chabot, the city's coordinator for the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, that it would take eight years and about \$500,000 for the city to fulfill his request.

Dube has been a thorn in the side of police, city hall and public works for the past

few years. His group was founded about four years ago to expose what he calls the "devious and predatory tactics" of city traffic enforcement.

WiseUp Winnipeg has rallied against photo enforcement, amber light times they say are too short and improper street signage warning drivers about upcoming intersection speed cameras.

(Winnipeg Free Press)

**SUNDAY
DECEMBER 23, 2012**

Dec 23 2012

OTTAWA, Ont. - A major new study on how much spousal violence costs Canadian society puts the price tag at more than \$7 billion for just one year.

Researchers at Justice Canada made a detailed accounting of all reported incidents of spousal violence in 2008, looking at the cost of health care, police, social services and personal costs such as lost wages.

The report found far more women hurt by spousal violence, costing them and society \$4.8 billion, while male victims cost \$2.6 billion.

The Canadian Press obtained the study, completed this fall, under the Access to Information Act.

Almost 50,000 cases of spousal violence were reported to police in 2008.

**TUESDAY
DECEMBER 25, 2012**

Dec 25 2012

MONTREAL - Blitzed by tips and interview requests from around the world, the public face of the Montreal police force says that in two decades on the job he'd never seen anything like the Luka Rocco Magnotta case.

Cmdr. Ian Lafreniere says last spring's intense interest in the accused killer swamped the department with 500 tips.

The force's lead spokesman also spoke to international media at all hours of the night, across numerous time zones - everywhere from Western Canada to France to Singapore.

"It was completely crazy," Lafreniere, an 18-year veteran of the force, said in an interview. "But... I'm not complaining about it - I'm not the one that lost their child."

The extraordinary attention generated by the Magnotta case - and the shocking nature of the alleged crimes - has led to its selection as Canada's 2012 News Story of the Year in the annual poll of newsmakers by The Canadian Press.

The announcement comes just days after Magnotta was named Newsmaker of the Year, in a selection that whipped up a storm of outrage.

Many had said choosing the 30-year-old as Newsmaker of the Year just gave him the publicity he appeared to crave. Others demanded that The Canadian Press redo the poll.

Both results were actually compiled at the same time, in early December, in The Canadian Press annual survey of different news

organizations across the country. More than 100 newsrooms that are clients of CP took part in the voting.

"We realize this selection by editors and news directors is also controversial," said Scott White, editor-in-chief of The Canadian Press.

"There are many unpleasant and sometimes gruesome stories that make their way to the top of newscasts or the front pages of newspapers or websites. This choice reflects that the international search for a Canadian suspected of a heinous crime was a worldwide story.

"It's not an honour to be named Newsmaker of the Year or to be part of the news story of the year. It's simply a reflection of the stories that dominated the news."

In the News Story of the Year survey, the Magnotta case received 22 per cent of the votes cast by editors and news directors across Canada.

Back in Montreal, Lafreniere called the search for Magnotta the biggest manhunt in the history of the force.

He thinks Magnotta's selection as News Story of the Year makes sense in terms of how much media coverage the case received.

But he has concerns about giving him so much publicity.

"That person was looking so much for attention," the police officer said.

"Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that it was a bad choice. I'm just saying that we're almost giving him what he was looking for."

Dec 25 2012

He's been called Canada's coolest cop and has become somewhat of a celebrity in his southern Alberta community, but Const. Doug Sokoloski insists his story is just one example of the many positive gestures made by Mounties on the job every day.

The 49-year-old RCMP officer who lives in Pincher Creek, Alta., shot into the national spotlight after an Internet video showed him rocking the drums during an impromptu jam session with a group of campers he came across on a patrol.

The entire episode - which went viral after it was posted on YouTube this summer - took just four minutes but generated a lasting sense of goodwill towards the force.

"It's a good news story," Sokoloski tells The Canadian Press. "I'm not going to end up in a big band or gain any popularity or riches out of it but if it enhances the image of policing and of the RCMP, and it makes our job easier to do, you know, then go with it."

Sokoloski, who primarily deals with traffic incidents and acts as a spokesman for the Mounties in Pincher Creek, believes the small positive acts carried out by officers on a daily basis go unnoticed far too often.

"We get chastised for the few bad things we do, but every day there's thousands of good things done by police officers in our communities," he says.

Indeed, the popular drumming video provided a welcome boost to the perception of the Mounties in a year when the RCMP's image has been battered by allegations of harassment and abusive behaviour within the force.

In his community, Sokoloski takes a

hands-on approach to policing and focuses on building meaningful relationships with residents.

Those bonds, he says, have undoubtedly been strengthened by all the buzz generated by the widely circulated video.

"From a work perspective it's made the job a lot easier and people want to approach you a lot more," he says with a chuckle. "I think it's made it easier for the other members in the area too."

The 17-year veteran of the force says he typically plays the guitar, and used to rock bars in Saskatchewan in the '80s with a band called "Shy Boy." On occasion, he hammered away at the drums as well.

The incident which took place in July was just one part of a regular patrol for Sokoloski, who was driving along a rural forest access road when he spotted a set of drums through the trees. After chatting with the campers who were playing their instruments in the woods, Sokoloski asked if he could join in.

"I had never met the guy before, I didn't know what he was playing, so I just got a feel for it and I just played a beat," he recalls. "I've never seen people jam in the forest before."

The video of Sokoloski rocking out in the woods has since garnered more than 900,000 views on YouTube.

The popularity of the clip prompted him to display his musical prowess in public once more over the summer. This time, it was at a community parade during which he and two other Mounties rocked out on a float for 45 minutes.

"We just basically played some twelve bar blues, kinda rock with an edge in our red serge," he explains. "We wanted to bring the RCMP closer to the community and we were kind of going off the theme of the original video and it was remarkable the response we got."

Sokoloski hopes to participate in next year's parade in some way as well and, going forward, is more than happy for his musical escapades to reveal a lighter side to the force.

"It was never intended to be anything more than just a basic standard day," he says of the episode in the woods.

"But I think any time you get some positive spin you have to keep the momentum going."

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 26, 2012

Dec 26 2012

MISSISSAUGA, Ont. - The Special Investigations Unit has been called in to investigate a police shooting in Oshawa, Ont. early today.

The SIU says at about 1:20 a.m., a man Durham Region police were investigating man entered a business (in the King Street East and Charles Street area).

About an hour later, says the agency, the man drove a vehicle out of the business and he was shot following "an interaction with the police."

The man is being treated in hospital for non-life threatening injuries.

His name has not been released.

Dec 26 2012

EDMONTON - A man accused of shooting at Edmonton police and holding RCMP at bay in a rural motel faces 31 criminal charges, with more pending.

Police say things went wrong Sunday night during a routine traffic stop in Edmonton when the driver of an SUV fired a shot at officers before speeding off.

Edmonton police say they found a suspect on Christmas Day at a motel in Redwater, a rural community north of the capital.

Police say when more shots were fired an RCMP tactical team surrounded the motel and arrested a man after a seven-hour standoff.

Patrick Young, 22, faces aggravated assault on a police officer and 30 other charges, including firearms offences.

Police say RCMP are to lay additional charges.

(The Canadian Press)

Dec 26 2012

Two firefighters wounded by a gunman who set his upstate New York house ablaze and killed two of their colleagues in an ambush with weapons he wasn't allowed to own were on the mend Wednesday and said they were thankful for the support they've received.

Investigators, meanwhile, traced the gunman's weapons and tried to confirm a body found in his destroyed house was his sister's.

West Webster volunteer firefighters Joseph Hofstetter and Theodore Scardino, who had been in guarded condition, were being upgraded to satisfactory condition on Wednesday at Rochester's Strong Memorial Hospital, which released a statement from them saying they were "humbled and a bit overwhelmed by the outpouring of well wishes for us and our families."

The firefighters said their "thoughts and prayers" were with the families of colleagues Michael Chiapperini and Tomasz Kaczowka, killed by William Spengler Jr., a convicted felon barred from having guns. Funerals are set for the next few days for Chiapperini and Kaczowka.

Authorities said Spengler set a car on fire and touched off an "inferno" in his Webster home on a strip of land along the Lake Ontario shore, took up a sniper's position and opened fire on the first firefighters to arrive at about 5:30 a.m. on Christmas Eve.

Spengler, 62, traded rifle fire with a Webster police officer who had accompanied the firefighters and then killed himself with a gunshot to the head.

Investigators found a rambling, two- to three-page typed letter laying out Spengler's intention to destroy his neighbourhood and "do what I like doing best, killing people."

They believe remains found in the burned home are those of Cheryl Spengler, but that hadn't been confirmed, and it was unknown how she died. The Spengler siblings had lived in the home with their mother, Arline Spengler, who died in October. In all, seven houses were destroyed by the flames.

There also was no word from authorities about how William Spengler, who served time for his grandmother's beating death, got three

guns found with his body: a military-style Bushmaster .223-calibre semiautomatic rifle, a 12-gauge shotgun and a .38-calibre revolver.

Federal authorities confirmed Wednesday they had traced the sale of the weapons, but they didn't release details.

Spengler spent 17 years in prison for beating his paternal grandmother to death with a hammer in 1980. He had been released from parole on the manslaughter conviction in 2006, and authorities said they had had no encounters with him since.

Police Chief Gerald Pickering said investigators believe Spengler used the rifle to attack the firefighters because of the distance involved. He said police may never know Spengler's motive.

Chiapperini, who also was a police lieutenant, was driving a pumper with Scardino on board when bullets blasted the windshield. He and Kaczowka died at the scene. Hofstetter was hit in the pelvis, and Scardino was hit in the shoulder and knee.

A passing off-duty officer from the town of Greece was treated for shrapnel wounds from gunfire that hit his car.

A funeral for Chiapperini is scheduled for Sunday.

A funeral Mass for Kaczowka, who worked as a Monroe County emergency dispatcher, will be held Monday in Rochester.

(Associated Press)

THURSDAY DECEMBER 27, 2012

Dec 27 2012

ORILLIA - During the early months of 2012 citizens from across Ontario were randomly selected and surveyed about OPP services.

The survey revealed that over 95.8 per cent of Ontarians feel 'safe' or 'very safe' in their communities. A majority of respondents indicated that they feel safe when travelling on Ontario's provincial highways, and that they were satisfied with the visibility of the OPP's marine and ATV patrols.

Distracted driving has become a recent focus as part of the OPP provincial traffic enforcement initiative. When it came to survey questions about whether they would likely use a hand-held device while driving, 66 per cent said they would never do it, and 24 per cent said they were 'not likely' to do it. Three per cent said they do it all the time.

On average, respondents living in areas primarily policed by the OPP and receiving all police services were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the services provided by the OPP.

The information that was collected from the public will be useful in helping the OPP set goals and objectives to improve on the services it delivers to communities throughout Ontario.

The surveys are done throughout the province annually, and further surveys will be conducted again during the Spring of 2013.

(OPP news release)