

Spotlight on Public Safety

Monthly report to the HRM Board of Police Commissioners - December 2012



Introducing Sergeant Scott MacDonald HRM's Interim Public Safety Officer

Sergeant Scott MacDonald was appointed to fill the role of HRM's Public Safety Officer on an interim basis on November 16. Sgt. MacDonald replaces Don Spicer who announced his retirement after almost 35 years in policing. Sgt. MacDonald reported to (Ret'd) Superintendent Spicer for the past 3 1/2 years and worked alongside him on many public safety initiatives. As a result, Sgt. MacDonald has a keen sense of the position and its partnerships.

Sgt. MacDonald has been a police officer with Halifax Regional Police for 13 years. He started his policing career as a patrol constable and later worked as a school officer and community officer before being promoted to the rank of sergeant in 2007. As a sergeant, he was a shift supervisor and has been the Officer-in-Charge of the Community Relations and Crime Prevention Section for the past 3 1/2 years. He is a member of the HRM Pension Committee

and sits on the Union Executive of the Halifax Regional Police Association. He has two degrees, a Master of Business Administration and a Bachelor of Commerce, both from Dalhousie University. He has also completed the Rotman School of Business Board Effectiveness Program at the University of Toronto, and is currently enrolled in the Canadian Police Association Executive Leadership Program.

"As the Honourable Ross Landry, Minister of Justice, indicated in his November 29 resolution to the Nova Scotia Legislature congratulating Don Spicer on his retirement, I have very large shoes to fill," says Sgt. MacDonald. "I look forward to your continued support and patience as I settle into my new role."

See page 4 for more on Scott's perspective on public safety.

Community Engagement

Engage citizens and community groups in playing an active role in public safety in HRM.

- On November 3, police, community and over 35 service providers joined forces to provide a day of comfort and services to over 625 people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. The clients accessed everything from flu shots and blood pressure/glucose testing to haircuts, a hot meal, books and warm clothing. The event wouldn't have been possible without the participation of the 200 volunteers who generously donated their time both the day before and the day of the event.

Diversity

Strengthen HRM's connection with our diverse communities while at the same time addressing quality-of-life issues within those communities.

- On November 17, RCMP Constable Trish Grobmeier took part in "Jessie's Day" at the Gordon Snow Community Center in Fall River. The event was organized by family and friends of Jessica Borden, a local youth who committed suicide in January 2012. Speakers from Kids Help Phone and Laing House shared information and raised awareness regarding youth mental health issues. The event raised close to \$11,000 for the Kids Help Phone through donations, raffles and games.

Public Safety is everyone's responsibility. WHAT ROLE WILL YOU PLAY?

Partnerships

Align with all levels of government, social agencies and community partners to realize efficiencies and improve public safety programs and services in HRM.

- Mental health issues were identified in the Mayor's Roundtable Report as a factor contributing to the lack of safety in HRM. They are also recognized by the World Health Organization as one of the main root causes of crime. The Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team (MHMCT) conducted over 1,000 interventions in November. On average, only 20-25 per cent of referrals come from police. That means the MHMCT is intervening with the other 75-80 per cent of referrals before they get to the stage of becoming involved in activity that requires police attention. This service plays a direct role in contributing to community safety.
- Nova Scotia families, people, municipal governments, community groups and others will be able to help craft the province's first long-term affordable housing strategy. On November 7, Community Services Minister Denise Peterson-Rafuse announced the launch of a public consultation that will include several public meetings in communities across the province. More information is available at <http://www.novascotia.ca/coms/hs>.

Police Community Response

Halifax Regional Police (HRP) and Halifax District RCMP must continue to implement policing strategies which reduce crime and enhance public safety.

- The new RCMP Community Policing Office in Beaver Bank at the new Kinsac Community Centre has officially opened its doors on November 24. The Beaver Bank Kinsac Community Centre has been in the process of rebuilding since a fire destroyed the entire structure in September 2009. The RCMP Volunteer/Community Policing office had been operating out of a local school for the past three years thanks to a dedicated group of volunteers. Those volunteers are excited to begin helping the community from their new location. Members of the community are encouraged to drop in and talk to the volunteers.
- Non-emergency online reporting in HRM is now available to all residents in both English and French. During the first phase of the project, online reporting

Holiday Cheer

HRM Partners in Policing were busy during the month of November helping citizens get in the holiday spirit at numerous festive events throughout HRM.



Cst. Dianne Woodworth and Cruise lead the way at the 38th Annual Spryfield Santa Claus Parade on November 25.

was offered primarily to those HRM residents living in the urban core areas policed by HRP. The system has now been expanded to include all areas of HRM, from Sheet Harbour to Hubbards. The expansion also includes the option to submit online reports in both official languages. Online reporting is accessible at:
 English - <https://www.halifax.ca/police/NonDispatch>
 French - <https://www.halifax.ca/police/nondispatchFR>.

Sustainability Initiatives

HRM as an organization must undertake a variety of initiatives to improve public safety.

- The HRM Community Response Team conducted 14 Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design audits/reviews during the month of November.
- The HRM Volunteer Awards recognize the extraordinary contributions of individuals and groups who volunteer their time and skills to deliver services and programs throughout HRM. The deadline for nominations is December 14. For more information visit www.halifax.ca/volunteerservices.

Other Strides made to Support Public Safety

There is other great work being done by that doesn't fall within the above themes but contributes to public safety in HRM.

- Members of the HRP/RCMP Integrated Traffic Unit focussed on vehicle safety inspection sticker compliance and enforcement of vehicle insurance during November. Members of the unit issued 580 Summary Offence Tickets during the month. In December, the unit will focus on impaired driving.
- Members of the HRP/RCMP Integrated Traffic Unit joined law enforcement agencies from across the province to launch Operation Christmas on November 23 in New Glasgow. To signify the start of Operation Christmas, checkpoints targeting impaired drivers were set up throughout New Glasgow. There will be an increased number of checkpoints across the province throughout the holiday season. The annual campaign is aimed at reducing impaired driving and encouraging motorists to practice safe winter driving. The traffic unit will commence Operation Christmas road check points in HRM beginning December 10. Impaired driving is one of the leading causes of preventable death and serious injuries on Nova Scotia's roads. In 2011, 19 Nova Scotians died in alcohol-related automobile collisions.



Constable Patricia Kennedy (right), a Community Response Officer working in the Greystone area of Spryfield, was presented with the Atlantic Women in Law Enforcement Police Officer of the Year Award at a reception on November 30 at Government House in Halifax. Pictured here with Cst. Kennedy is the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, His Honour Brigadier-General The Honourable J.J. Grant, CMM, ONS, CD (Ret'd).

Communications Corner

Communication underpins the success of the HRM Public Safety Strategy. Below is an overview of major communication initiatives from November:

HRP

Media relations

- Issued 50 media releases, 34 were about crimes/crime trends and public safety issues, and 16 were proactive/educational. Watch Commanders issued 60 media reports.
- Responded to 339 media requests.
- Arranged for a number of interviews on November and the 100th anniversary of the use of motorcycles by Halifax police.

Social media

- The HRP Twitter account has 8,534 followers and 5,946 people like HRP on Facebook.
- The HRP YouTube channel was viewed by 26,264 people in November, bringing our total views to 72,366. The spike in views is attributed to the November 30 release of two videos of a shooting incident where police are seeking the public's assistance identifying the suspect.
- The Spotlight on Public Safety blog received 559 views in November, for a total of 18,652 views.

Community outreach/education

- Produced two community newspaper columns - one acknowledging the achievements of Supt. Don Spicer as HRM's Public Safety Officer and the other on holiday shopping tips.

RCMP

Media relations

- Issued 17 media releases, 13 were about crimes/crime trends and public safety issues, and four were proactive/educational.
- Responded to 130 media requests.

Community outreach/education

- Produced two community newspaper columns - one on safe winter driving and the other on how to prevent fraud during the holiday season.

Social media

- There are 6,092 people who like RCMP on the English-language Facebook page and 34 on the French-language Facebook page. The RCMP Twitter account currently has 5,854 followers in English and 399 in French.

Perspectives on Public Safety

Five questions for HRM's new Public Safety Officer

We sat down with Sergeant Scott MacDonald, HRM's new interim Public Safety Officer to get his perspective on public safety in HRM.

1. Do you believe HRM is a safe place in which to live?

Absolutely. I'm proud to live and raise my family here. I believe that the majority of HRM citizens feel safe where they work, live and play. At the same time, I recognize that crime in 2011 in our community wasn't within the norm. I'm cognizant of the fact that the people who live in the affected areas may feel unsafe. I also understand that while citizens may feel safe in their own neighbourhoods, the knowledge that violent crimes have occurred in other areas may negatively impact their overall impression of public safety in HRM. We have work to do but I'm confident that our public safety strategy has us on the right path. Crime in 2012 is trending downward. As of the third quarter, violent crime is down over 13 per cent and property crime is down almost eight per cent. Homicides are also down over 33 percent - we had 19 last year and 10 to date in 2012.

2. How do you measure public safety?

A basic measure would be quantitative data such as crime statistics, but I believe we need to look beyond numbers. When the vast majority of people, both residents and those living outside of HRM, view our municipality as a safe and welcoming community, and our crime rates support that belief, then I think we can say that we are succeeding on the public safety front.

3. What are the top three issues impacting public safety in HRM?

1) Youth at-risk. A disproportionate number of youth are responsible for crime in our community. At the same time, they are also more at-risk of being a victim of crime than other age demographics. This is particularly true of violent crime. The two biggest factors putting our youth at-risk of being drawn into a criminal lifestyle include the socio-economic situation they find themselves in and a home life that has been exposed to violence/criminal activity. 2) Gun violence and a greater inclination than ever before to resort to using firearms. 3) Drug addiction and abuse of alcohol. Feeding a habit often drives addicts to criminal behaviour such as robbery/assaults and break and enters. The increase we've seen in assaults in the downtown Halifax bar district can largely be attributed to physical confrontations between inebriated individuals. On the flip side, drug addiction and the culture surrounding alcohol puts people at greater risk of being a victim of violent crime.

4. What is your vision for public safety?

My predecessor, Superintendent Don Spicer, coined the phrase "Public safety is everyone's responsibility." I'm adopting that as my mantra. My vision involves shared accountability with public safety being a top consideration for government, the private sector, community organizations and citizens alike. I envision public safety as being a key priority in strategic planning and budgeting processes. Addressing the root causes of crime is a complex and ongoing endeavor. To be effective in breaking the cycle of violent crime, we need holistic, sustainable programs that support both individuals and communities.

5. How can we engage citizens in playing a more active role in public safety?

Being part of the public safety equation doesn't have to be complicated. There are three simple ways citizens can enhance public safety in HRM. 1) Be the "eyes and ears" in your neighbourhood and report any suspicious activity to police. 2) Make crime prevention a daily practice. Police agencies have a responsibility to inform and educate citizens about crime trends and prevention tips, but then it's their responsibility to put that information to good use. 3) Be an involved parent. Growing up today is difficult and our youth need their parents to be actively involved in their lives.

Any final thoughts?

Supt. Spicer was known for saying that police alone can't solve the problem of crime in our community. I look forward to working with public safety key stakeholders and citizens to continue the amazing work he has done to enhance public safety in HRM.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss what can be done to further the objectives of the HRM Public Safety Strategy. You can reach me at 490-6166 or macdons@halifax.ca.

Public Safety Social Media

The public safety twitter feed and public safety blog are hibernating while Sgt. MacDonald receives social media training. Stay tuned in January for his first blog and tweet.