

The Changing Face of York Security

Ex-Metro Inspector O'Neil outlines plans for revamping security

By ZENA McBRIDE

Excalibur: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

O'Neil: I spent just over 26 years with the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force. I started with the force in '61 as a cadet, (then graduated to) constable; I was (also) a detective at one point in time. Then I was promoted to Staff Sergeant, and was made an Inspector in 1983. I resigned from the force on May 19, and I started here on the 25th of May.

Excalibur: What shape is York security in now, and what changes would you like to make?

O'Neil: Basically, we've got some good core people here; we've got the nucleus of a good security service. So what I want to do is make a few changes—some personnel changes—build the morale, and generate the idea that we're here to provide a service to the community.

(I also want to) provide the people in the security office and the people out doing the actual security job with the best tools that we can to do the job. We've been giving them instruction, and each officer from the York campus had a five-day course in basic security work, conducted by SES (Security Educational Services). We've also given them a short course in defensive training. A driver training course is (also) coming up.

We've put a computer into the control centre, so that they can access the records that they need to access when most needed, probably after 4:00 p.m.

We've come up with a form that we use for banning trespassers from the campus. It puts more teeth into the work we're doing, because then we can simply turn around and say to the Metropolitan Toronto Police force 'this person was banned in writing, he was served with that notice, we want him charged,' and they'll go down and charge him.

We've been talking about getting away from the Timkin shift because people in the security that were working the shift schedule were only getting one weekend off in 14. So now we're looking at the 12-hour shift schedule which means they would work three days, have three

Excalibur: Last year there was quite a bit of talk about special constable status for the security officers. Is this feasible, or even desirable for York University?

O'Neil: I don't see any advantage with special constable status. Special constable status was given to University of Toronto people so that they can enforce city by-laws. But they have no greater powers of arrest than our own people have. When it comes to powers of arrest, I have a draft letter that's being examined by the University's solicitors' firm of McCarthy and McCarthy, and in that letter—it will be directed to each security officer—it will say "you are empowered to act as an agent of York University to enforce the provisions in the criminal code," and it sets out their powers of arrest under the two different sections of the criminal code. (Those are) the same powers of arrest as they have as citizens, and the powers of arrest they have as an agent of the owner of the property. (The letter) also sets out the powers of arrest under the Trespass of Property Act. It then goes on to say that, if they are in the lawful execution of those duties as an agent of York University, the University will provide them with any legal defence required, should they be sued, or should there be some litigation against them for having performed those duties.

Excalibur: That will clarify the security officer's role?

O'Neil: Yes. It'll be there in writing. We're also in the throes right now of revising job descriptions for the security officer and the senior security officer. This is one of the contentious issues that was discussed in *Excalibur* last year. It looked from appearances that 85% of the time was spent doing parking duties at the time. We're re-writing that so that it specifies the more important aspects of enforcing provisions of the criminal code and Trespass of Property Act, and responding to emergency calls and alarms, and that sort of thing. The traffic duties will be put in perspective—I think it's down to 15%.

like a nightstick, all it does is add to our liability. We've given the course on self-defense, and all the people who went through it come out saying "I feel better now about approaching situations." I think if we allow people to rely on weapons going into situations that are tense, then there's more likelihood that they will resort to the use of those weapons. But if we build their confidence that they're capable of handling themselves in these situations without the use of weapons it will tend to de-escalate the situation as opposed to escalating the situation.



THE NEW BOSS: Michael O'Neil was appointed the new Director of Security.

I've discussed it with the people who work in security and they appreciate my point of view. I think that we have to look at the situation in the community. We don't see that much violence here. If we got to the point where there was an escalation in the amount of violence, especially violence towards our security officers, then we would have to re-examine our position, but by and large, it's a fairly peaceful community, and we intend to keep it that way.

Excalibur: You mentioned that there is a computer in the control centre. Could you elaborate a bit on that?

O'Neil: I think it is a basic tool for the officers who are trying to do the job. We're redesigning reports to match up with the program. We purchased the software program for, believe it or not, a couple of hundred dollars.

Our report forms . . . are going to follow the same layout as the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force report, and enter it into their computer without having to jump back and forth across the page trying to find information.

Excalibur: There's been a problem with low morale on the force. What things will you do to change that?

O'Neil: By giving them the tools to do the job. The computer is one of them; giving them the one week training course with SES; and the defense training—this is going to say "we believe in you; we believe that you can do the job."

I've started an open-door policy where the officers can come in and talk to me at any time. I encourage them to go through channels, to go first to Mr. Pond to try and resolve any difficulties, but if that can't be done, then we want to talk about it, and I want to show them that I have confidence in them; that they can do the job.

Excalibur: I suppose projects like the bike patrol, that security officers could initiate, would help morale too.

O'Neil: Well, that's student security . . . It was the brainchild of one of the students and we've simply encouraged them to carry it through. Student Security feel that they have ownership of that project. We think that this is why it's really going to succeed. Because it's theirs, they will work to make sure that there is a degree of success with it.

But we're giving (regular) security other details as well. We've had several of the officers work in plainclothes from time to time. But we're going to offer more challenge, and I also want to try and indicate to them that there is a career path for them here, that eventually they can graduate up. Hopefully one day one of our current security officers will be taking over my job, as opposed to the University having to go

outside to recruit somebody for this position. We should be developing our own people, encouraging them, providing them with the opportunity to advance and (take) courses that will prepare them for that advancement.

Excalibur: So that opportunity didn't exist before?

O'Neil: Well, it didn't appear to from what I can see.

Excalibur: Student Security has complained that they can't detain someone unless they are accompanied by an officer—that is one of their concerns.

O'Neil: Student Security has the basic powers of arrest that any citizen has. I'm saying to them that I don't want them to go out and get themselves involved in a situation on their own, where they have to jeopardize their own safety. What I suggest to them is, if they come upon a situation where an arrest should be made, they call for regular security. If the situation demands their immediate intervention, they have the powers of arrest the same as any ordinary citizen has—if they find someone committing an offense, then they are empowered by law to go in and use as much force as is necessary to arrest or to stop that offence.

Let's say they came upon a situation where a woman was being assaulted by a male in some of our bushes around here. I'm not going to say to them "don't intervene in that situation, stand back and let regular security handle it." That's not the question. They immediately go in and they do what they have to do to protect the life and safety of the person who's being assaulted. We would all do that without question. But if they come upon a situation where they have an option to either intervene directly themselves, or wait for regular security to arrive, then I think they should wait for regular security and not risk their own safety.

Excalibur: Fall and spring are usually the worst times for crime on campus. Besides the new bike patrol, are there any other security measures that you will implement to curb such occurrences during these periods?

O'Neil: We had hoped to have a crime prevention officer in place before this, and we hope we'll have that person in place as soon as possible. We want to start an education programme that will suggest to people to be responsible for their own security by avoiding situations where they are jeopardizing their own safety.

Excalibur: Do you see the fact that we're located near the Jane-Finch corridor as a special problem?

O'Neil: It represents a problem. But one of the steps we've been taking to reduce crime from that area, is that when we find people here on campus who have no business to be here, and are engaged in any suspicious activities, we issue them with a trespass notice. And we are going to back that up so that every time they are found on this campus, then they will be charged by the Metropolitan Toronto police force. There is up to a maximum fine of \$1,000 for trespassing, and we intend to enforce that aspect of the Trespass of Property Act. We will (also) be arresting people who we find committing crimes on our campus. I think that once the message gets out to the Jane-Finch area, any people living there who intend to come in here and commit deviant acts will know that the security service here is intent on deterring them.

Excalibur: Do you think you will be working more closely with the police; will they be patrolling our campus more?

O'Neil: Yes. This is part of their patrol area, and they should be coming through here. Certainly, there's an increased presence of police here because I know a lot of them personally. The staff inspector at 31 division, I've known for roughly 20 years. We have them coming in and out on a regular basis, and I'm going to encourage them to do so.

The crime analyst from 31 division has been over here a couple of times and we're sharing information with him about how our computer program is working, and he's helping us with the forms that we're redesigning. There's excellent co-operation at this point in time, and I'm sure it will continue and increase.

Excalibur: Have you seen a rise or drop in crime lately?

O'Neil: Too soon for me to say. We have some statistics that indicate the dollar value has decreased, but it's too early to start trying to draw any implications from that. I would be reluctant to draw any inference at this point in time, because we could be hit with a miniature crime wave next week that would prove me all wrong. So, let's put it this way, we're preparing to combat crime, and hope that our performance will reduce it.



ON CALL: Security has recently acquired a new computer system which will make past files and important information a lot more accessible for officers.

days off, and they would end up with every second weekend off. And in order to bring all this about, we formed a labour management committee (just a couple of weeks ago); we're actively discussing the implications of that—we have to look at the feasibility of it. And it looks good at this point in time.

We're going to look at recruiting better applicants; we hired a woman on September 8, so already we've doubled our female content in the security force here at York. We're hiring a crime prevention officer. We're also in the process of setting up a security advisory committee. We'll meet on a regular basis and just generally discuss what's going on with security at York, and they'll make recommendations to us as to how they think we could improve our service to the community.

We are (also) in the process now of increasing the numbers in student security. Normally it goes up to 60-80 in the winter months, or school year. So this year we're looking at going up to about 80-100, so we'll have a good supply to draw from. And also we've added a bike patrol. It's our hope that we'll cover more territory on campus more frequently.

Our objective, I guess, is to provide a safe, secure environment in which community members can live, study, and generally enjoy life, and I want to encourage people to use the campus as much as they can, because the more use they make of the campus, the safer it's going to be. There are some areas on campus that we all know are not too safe to use after dark. And we're continuing of course with our student escort service.

Excalibur: What about the job requirements for security officers—are there going to be any height requirements, or age requirements, or will that stay the same?

O'Neil: Well, (as far as parking officers are concerned) that's pretty much governed by the human rights code. When it comes to (regular) security, yes, we're going to be looking at people that are physically fit to do the job, and mentally fit of course, and having some basic qualifications—a combination of experience and schooling. In order to try and establish a reservoir of applicants, I'm talking to Sheridan College about participating in a co-op program, where they would supply us with two to four of their students from the Law Enforcement program on a regular basis. They would come to us two days a week and work with our security officers as on the job learning. They wouldn't be compensated for that financially, and they would not take the job of a full-time person. They're simply here to watch and learn. And we can observe them and decide whether or not they would be good applicants in the future. The idea of providing a security service in the academic setting is unique—I think we have to be much more conscious of our interpersonal skills and community relations.

Excalibur: What about the carrying of weapons such as nightsticks or handguns by security guards?

O'Neil: We've discussed it, and the thing that has to be appreciated here is that if we add a thing