

Bruce Lemcke returns to policing roots in Dufferin County

By Mike Pickford

With a rich familial history firmly entrenched in community policing, particularly in Dufferin County, Bruce Lemcke always had an inkling that he would return to his roots and continue his family's legacy.

Stretching back more than 70 years, the Lemcke name carries considerable weight across much of southwestern Ontario and deservedly so. Boasting four generations of police officers, the Lemckes have embodied exactly what it means to serve a community. Following a 35-year career with Peel Regional Police, Bruce recently returned home, becoming the newest addition to the Orangeville Police Service.

Hired back in April as a part-time beat officer, Bruce spends much of his time at local schools and patrolling Broadway. It's helped him to develop a connection and sense of community that he never really had during his many years working with the police in Peel. "I had a lot of incredible experiences during my time in Peel, I made a lot of great friends, but it didn't take me long at all to see how different things are at Orangeville Police Service. The first thing, right off the bat is the engagement. I can tell you, whenever I'm downtown on the beat, I get three or four people minimum stop and talk to me and thank me for being there. It's great," Bruce said. To say Bruce has had policing on the brain for the majority of his life would be an understatement. His grandfather, Art Lemcke, was Police Chief in Warton for more than a decade, serving the Bruce County community from 1950 to 1962. His father, Carmen Lemcke, was known simply as 'The Law' for generations in Shelburne, serving first as constable for 12 months before assuming the position of Chief in 1957. He spent the next 36 years running the community's long-standing police service, becoming one of the longest-serving police chiefs in Canadian history.

Growing up as the son of the local chief law enforcer wasn't particularly easy on Bruce, who knew he had to hold himself to a higher standard than his peers because of his father's position. Nevertheless, at the ripe old age of 17 and with his high school career coming to a close, Bruce approached his dad to enquire about becoming a man of the law.

"He was very supportive of that, but he didn't ever try and direct me," Bruce recalled. "After I finished up at school I sent a few applications in, notably to Peel Regional Police and waited to hear back."

And so he waited, and waited, and waited. He didn't receive a call. Undeterred, Bruce took a position within the Town of Shelburne's Parks and Recreation department, eventually going on to manage the community's old arena and sports complex. He stayed there for roughly four years before moving on to a factory job in Brampton. As luck would have it, that factory was located right beside the Peel Regional Police building. After a while, he decided to give it another go.

In September 1980 he submitted another application to Peel police and by Dec. 1 he had been offered a position. Having just turned 23 years of age, Bruce started as a uniformed constable on Dec. 29 of that year.

"I loved it right off the bat. I always enjoyed working with the public during my time with the Town of Shelburne, and that just increased when I joined Peel Regional Police," Bruce said. "I guess I enjoyed the excitement of the job, going out on patrols, working with and helping the public. It was a very rewarding position."

After seven years working in uniform, Bruce started to look for opportunities to further his career. He applied to become a sergeant in 1987 before being offered a spot in the Major Drugs and Vice unit. That was an eye-opening experience, Bruce recalls, as he was learning new and different things almost daily.

Heading into the 1990s and still a member of the drug squad, Bruce was assigned to a drug enforcement team at Pearson International Airport. He spent two years there dealing with highly organized crime, much of it centring on the Colombian cartels who were continuously attempting to ship large amounts of cocaine into the country. In total, Bruce put in eight years at Major Drugs and Vice before transferring to the Fraud Bureau in 1995.

The skills he learned working the drug scene stood him in good stead for the frauds department. He became a Duty Detective in the late 90s. Before long, Bruce was the 'go to guy' whenever other officers or organizations needed help or information relating to a frauds case. After 13 years working in that unit, Bruce started to get the itch to try something new. Retirement had crossed his mind but, before he could properly communicate that with his seniors he was approached to take on a position as Labour Liaison Officer. "My job there was to work with unions and companies, CEO's, all the important players" Basically, whenever a strike had potential, I'd meet with everyone and discuss protocols, safety procedures for the picket line, that sort of thing," Bruce said. "I was there for seven years and played a role in a lot of major strikes. There was the Region of Peel strike, Air Canada strike and the Canada Post strike. That was a challenging position."

As Christmas of 2015 approached, so did Bruce's 35th anniversary with Peel Regional Police. He decided it was time for him to move on and so gave notice that he would be leaving the service in August of 2016. He enjoyed his final few months before shifting

into retirement last fall. Not content with simply sitting at home, Bruce took numerous private investigator contracts over a six-month period prior to hearing about the opening with OPS. The rest, as they say, is history.

Upon reflection, although admitting he is proud of the 35-year career he etched out, he said his proudest accomplishment is seeing his two sons forge respectable careers for themselves ? one of them in community policing.

His eldest son, Bryan, became an auxiliary officer with Shelburne Police in 2003 before transitioning into a position with the Town of Orangeville. His second son, Greg, became an auxiliary officer in the early 2000s, eventually becoming a full-time constable in on April 5, 2007. That date in particular was significant as it marked almost 50 years to the day that Carmen Lemcke became a police officer with the same service. After four years with Shelburne Police, Greg transferred to the OPP in 2011.

When quizzed on what exactly it is that draws Lemckes to policing, Bruce shrugged his shoulders and stated simply that a long-standing family tradition of getting involved in and caring about the community probably helped.

?For me, I never really treated policing as a job. My dad didn't treat it that way and my boy doesn't treat it that way. For me, I treated it as an opportunity and like a public service. It was never about the money, it was never about the prestige, it was about the job satisfaction and being involved with the public,? Bruce said. ?I'm a chatty guy, so this role with OPS is perfect for me. I love meeting and speaking with people, which I get the opportunity to do each and every shift. It's another great opportunity than I'm thankful for.?