

## ASSOCIATION SPOTLIGHT

# North Bay Police Association: Working Towards Boosting Morale

By Lauren Alpern

The North Bay Police Association (NBPA) is dealing with many issues common to the other provincial associations: staff shortages, recruitment issues, morale and member mental health and wellness. In fact, President Vince Corrente thinks that the North Bay Police Service (NBPS) has a higher percentage of members out of the workplace on approved WSIB Operational Stress Injury Claims leave than most other services, which is causing burnout amongst the active members.

“We’re not unique in dealing with the problems of being understaffed and trying to get proper support for our members with mental health problems, but where we are unique is the percentage of people we have off, especially on the sworn side,” said Vince, who has been on the NBPA Executive for two years. “With about 22 sworn members off right now, we’re at over 20 per cent of members who are off work, the majority because of PTSD-related issues. That’s a pretty high percentage for a small service like us. Plus, very few come back once they’re off.”

With a regular complement of 104 sworn members, the NBPS is currently only operating with about 80 officers.



From left to right: Civilian Director Sarah Bush, Treasurer Jane Wilkinson, Executive Officer Geoff Whittle and President Vince Corrente.

Vince isn’t entirely sure why his association has such a high percentage of staff on leave, but he has his theories.

“I think part of the reason is that we just don’t have enough support systems in place. And we haven’t for years. I know that my friends and colleagues who attend traumatic scenes or events have had debriefings, but they’ve said they did not have enough ongoing support. As a result, a lot of them never properly work through things, which catches up with them,” said Vince, a sergeant with 18 years of service. “A lot of

our newer members take their own initiative because our service doesn’t have mental health resources. Many of our members who are off are the older generation because they’ve just had to grin and bear it. The previous generations are less open to getting help – that needs to change in our police service’s culture.”

Current NBPS Chief Scott Tod is the first chief in North Bay to implement any member mental health programs, including the Project Safeguard program in which a limited number of sworn officers and civilians in identified high

risk positions, such as child exploitation investigators, see a psychologist at regular intervals to check on their well-being. The association hopes to see this program made mandatory and expanded to all sworn members.

The Peer Connect program and a Wellness Committee are also up and running, while a wellness program is also in the works. The service has also been trying to hire a Wellness Coordinator, without success. Until that position is filled, it will be difficult to get the wellness program up and running.



“We’ve been able to work well with the chief, and we hope going forward that we can continue to do so – especially with health and wellness,” said Vince. “But until they get that Wellness Coordinator in, we won’t really have a wellness program. We have come a long way in the last few years, but we seem to be behind the rest of the province and need to catch up. Both the Association and Police Service will have to work together to improve our member wellness.”

Eric Krmptotic, a detective constable with 17 years of service and the association’s First-Vice President, agrees with Vince that until that role is filled, it will be difficult to move in the right direction.

“If that position were filled, it would be a good sign for members moving forward that this is being taken care of. I know a lot of the concern from the membership is that it’s not a priority for the administration,” said Eric. “We have the money



Top left: Treasurer Jane Wilkinson presents a donation cheque to a local charity golf tournament, which raises funds for PTSD. Left: Fundraising Committee from left to right – First-Vice President Eric Krmptotic, volunteer driver Walter Krmptotic and Treasurer Tania Mattes. Below: from left to right – the PAO’s Michael Duffy, Vince Corrente and PAO President Mark Baxter.



allotted to the role, but we can’t find someone to take the program and steer it in the right direction, which I think is causing lots of angst and concern with our members. We constantly have members going off. People think that if we had someone in place, maybe we could prevent some of this.”

Eric was keen to be involved with the NBPA in order to help the wellness component. He has been taking reintegration training to help officers return to work after being off for a long period of time.

He is also one of six Peer Connect supporters, but Eric says that despite all members being part of the app, usage is low. That lack of usage leaves few success stories to share, which makes it even more difficult to get the buy-in. In addition, the peer supporters are all busy with their full-time jobs and don’t have time to promote the tool.

“I’m not really busy as a peer supporter. I’m not sure why, but there’s skepticism that’s occurring here and there are trust issues on top of things. I’ve heard from members that they



Above left: President Vince Corrente and Inspector Jeff Warner have established a good working relationship between the police association and the command staff. Above: Vince Corrente presents the Police Hero Award to Sgt. Matt Parker.

**NBPA by the numbers**  
**Members: 170**  
**Year Founded: 1945**  
**Executive Members: 7**  
**Full-time Executive Members: 0**

don't feel supported by the organization, so it's often a moral injury as opposed to a stress injury," said Eric. "I know that burnout is a big issue right now. A lot of services are busy, but because

we have fewer officers on the road and our calls are increasing, we have to carry more of the weight. People are taking a break or even re-evaluating their career choice." Adding to the burnout

problem is the difficult task of recruiting. The NBPS board has approved the hiring of nine new officers in 2022 and the Chief is seeking to get approval for six more in 2023, but, as Vince says, the candidates aren't there.

"We have the permission to hire, but we're still struggling to hire – we just don't get the same number of candidates anymore," he said. "I think

part of the problem is the changing perception of police in society making people less interested in a policing career, and candidates aren't passing the background checks."

Things in North Bay might be tough, but the association remains committed to community involvement and is returning to the numerous charitable causes it was involved in prior to the pandemic. And while the NBPA's relationship with the community remains solid, Vince is committed to bringing about positive change internally, as well.

"I got involved with the association to try to improve the working conditions, camaraderie and morale for all of our members," he said. "It's tough when you don't have a building to socialize, but we're going to try to host more social events so people can get together. I'm not even sure that people are aware of what the association can do for them. I think we have to make better efforts in telling people what we do and who we are."



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