

# THE DISPATCH

**PAO**  
POLICE ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

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## MEET YOUR POLICE HERO AWARD WINNERS

Community Role Model Brad Adams of the Hamilton Police Association rode on horseback to raise awareness for stem cell donation

Jeff Elvish of the Thunder Bay Police Association opens up about his climb up from rock bottom

First Responders' mental health recognized as a priority in Ontario



# 2022 POLICE SERVICES HERO OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNERS HUMBLLED BY THE HONOUR

With over 300 nominations submitted by the public for the seventh annual Police Services Hero of the Year awards, the PAO Awards Committee had no easy task in selecting the winners in three categories. Read on to learn more about this year's winners—and remember, all finalists, nominees and sworn and civilian members are police heroes.

By Lauren Alpern

## Graham MacGregor, Ontario Provincial Police:

### On-Duty Difference Maker—Uniform/Sworn Police Officer

On September 28, 2019, Constable Graham MacGregor of the South Porcupine OPP detachment charged Andréa Lafleur with careless driving after she had crashed her vehicle into a tree. Her car was full of drug paraphernalia, although she was sober. She, however, was actually an addict suffering from PTSD after being a trafficking victim in British Columbia years earlier.

She had hit rock bottom and was thinking it would have been fine if the crash had ended her life.

Enter Graham.

While he didn't know Andréa's story until he read her statement, he did make her take accountability for her actions by laying charges and following up on them. He then followed up with Victim Services, connecting her with detectives who could help her, and setting in motion a course of events that changed Andréa's life. She admitted herself to hospital, spending 38 days in the Mental Health Unit, 14 days in a shelter, eight weeks in a trauma-based treatment facility and four months in a treatment facility. Graham visited Andréa at the hospital to see how she was doing—the only visitor she had.



President Mark Baxter presents Graham MacGregor with his award.



They saw each other again when Andréa returned from treatment because she needed to get fingerprinted. Then, too, he treated her with respect and dignity. She plead guilty and has a criminal record, yet Graham has still taken the time to be a part of her recovery.

"His words of encouragement empowered me to reclaim my voice and to keep going because he believed in me," said Andréa. "He made this all possible."

June 2022 marks 18 months of sobriety for Andréa. While she has lost her nursing career, she does dedicate time towards helping survivors find success in recovery and justice in healing from wounds that leave a person in a state of spiritual decay.

**"I'm so grateful that Graham can be recognized for what he's done. He says that I put the work in, but he gave me a shot."**



Top left: Graham with Andréa. Above: Graham and his daughter.



While Andréa's life has been transformed, Graham doesn't think he has done enough to merit the honour of a Police Hero Award.

"I'm pretty humbled by this honour, but really, I look at what a hero might be and it's not something I did. Look at the people who have given their lives in the line of duty," said Graham. "There were over 300 nominations and so many good stories—I can't believe I was singled out. I think Andréa did all of the work. She's the one who has really beaten the odds in this case."

While Andréa did the work in terms of recovery, Graham





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In these photos, Graham is busy with work and family life. To the immediate left, Andréa celebrates Halloween with her mother and son.



was her motivation, whether he accepts it or not. The minute or two he took out of his day to visit her in hospital and give her a word of encouragement were life-changing for her. And those little moments are not unusual for Graham.

"I will often pop in on people, whether it's a victim I've helped or someone in custody. It takes a couple of minutes out of your day. I don't have to do it, but I want to," said Graham, who, despite being a jokester with his colleagues, doesn't like being in the spotlight. "With Andréa, I had to go give her a ticket, but I also went to see how she was doing when I was off-duty to make sure she was keeping her head up, her focus up, and remind her that this was a fight worth fighting."

Seeing the way Andréa has been able to turn her life around and seeing her be a great mother to her five-year-old son, Thorin, is award enough for Graham. In fact, last Christmas, Andréa sent Graham her one-year sobriety key tag inside of a Christmas card. He keeps it on his keychain as a reminder.

"I keep it there to remind me that when I do good work,

it has an impact. People can be so critical of the police and you're always getting criticized. This is a reminder that we do have an impact, and it keeps your head up for a little bit," said Graham. "The fact that she's even around for her family and her kid is really amazing."

As for Andréa, she's just grateful that the key tag wasn't a toe tag. And so, she will send him the key tag every year as reminder of her gratitude.

"He's not someone who would be at Christmas dinner, but he's the reason I'm at Christmas dinner," said Andréa. "When you're having a really hard time and you're going through your list of supports, I can shoot him a message. That's a level of gratitude that's hard to express."

While Andréa knows that Graham doesn't think he deserves the award, the nomination was essentially her gift back to him. And she couldn't be happier that he won.

"I'm so grateful that he can be recognized for what he's done. He says that I put the work in, but he gave me a shot," said Andréa. "He's humble, he hates the spotlight, he has no ulterior motives and didn't do it for an award. That's what makes this something that needs to be recognized! I wasn't a project."

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## Megan Petzel, Thunder Bay Police Service:

### On-Duty Difference Maker—Civilian Police Service Employee

As a shift supervisor in the Communications Department with the Thunder Bay Police Service, Megan Petzel constantly answers calls that lead to saving lives. The call that led to her nomination, however, is one that she won't be forgetting anytime soon.

This one came in late November 2021. A young teenage girl from an outlying reserve was in town for school and dialed 911 with no idea where she was or how long she had been outside in -20 Celsius degree



Left: Mark and Megan at the PAO Awards Banquet. Below, Megan and her daughters.

weather. It was not known at the time that she suffered from epilepsy. She had just come-to after a seizure and was very disoriented.

Megan stayed on the phone with her and tried to get the girl to describe her location. She struggled to communicate, yet Megan remained calm and firm while trying to help. After a while, Megan was able to determine the park, but the geographical area was massive and the teen was unable to read any signs. While attempting to get an exact location, the girl stopped talking. Megan was left with an open line with no more assistance from the caller.



Megan and her team.  
Below: Megan and her partner.



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With help from her unit, Megan coordinated with the officers' sirens, airing them to sound how close they were getting. They managed to successfully locate the teenager mid-seizure. She was transported to hospital to be treated for hypothermia. This is one of the many difficult calls that Megan is so great at handling. She remains calm, efficient and determined to conclude calls with the highest quality of service.

Megan says it's in her nature to remain calm. "I definitely feel the adrenaline when I hang up the phone after calls like this, but it doesn't enter into the equation while dealing with the emergency in the moment. When I heard the officers get to her, I felt the rush, but I knew I had to stay calm and keep her talking to me and keep asking the right questions until they found her," said Megan, who has been in the role for 15 years. "For someone to be successful in this job, you need a certain personality. You need to be able to handle

stress. There are some calls that don't phase me now, which isn't necessarily a good thing." The call that did shock her, however, was the call she got letting her know that she had won the Police Services Hero of the Year award for Civilian On-Duty Difference Maker. Perhaps it's because she's so used to handling important calls to help others and not taking calls that might be about herself. Still, she's so happy about the honour. "I was blown away. I wasn't expecting it at all. It's very much an honour to win this award," said the mother of three. "It's recognition and acknowledgment to me and my team for all the hard work that we do every day as communications operations. It makes me extremely proud." So proud that once Megan's award has spent some time in the Comms Centre, it will live on the living room mantle beside her family photos.

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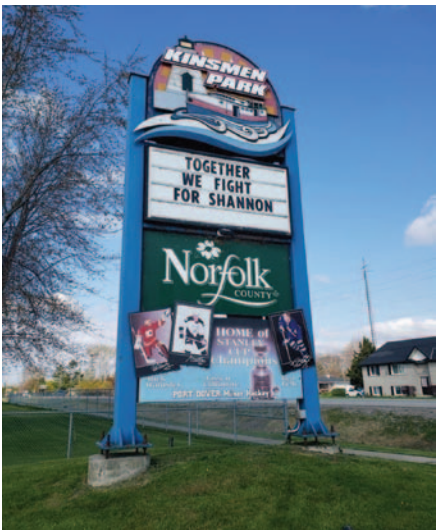
Left: Brad and his daughters accept his award. Above, with Shannon.



Brad Adams, Hamilton Police Service: Community Role Model

When tragedy struck in the Adams' household, Sergeant Brad Adams of the Hamilton Police Service wasn't going to sit tight. When his wife Shannon was diagnosed with plasma cell leukemia on December 17, 2020, the family had to act fast. The doctors' plan was to do a tandem stem cell transplant: first an autologous transplant using Shannon's cells, followed by a donor transplant. There was no match. "We knew time was limited. We had to get ahead of this cancer because it was so aggressive," said Brad. "I've never been the kind of guy to let the cards fall where they may, so I had to think about what I could do to save her. It seemed like the logical thing to do was to get awareness out there for stem cell donations." What happened next turned into a massive campaign. The family created a

Facebook group called Shannon's Plasma Cell Mates to try to find a match for the transplant. The group grew fast and was responsible for over 1,000 people signing up as stem cell donors, making it one of the largest campaigns of the year. But it wasn't long before Shannon was told she wasn't a candidate for a transplant because her cancer was too aggressive. Despite the family's crushing disappointment, Brad didn't want to let the Facebook group down. He knew that by raising awareness for stem cell donations and blood donations, they could still help others. So, he set off on a 10-day, 233-kilometre horseback ride across Hal-dimand and Norfolk Counties. "Because of my background in horses—I developed and implemented the Hamilton Police Mounted Patrol Unit, I have a horse farm and I'm a former rodeo cowboy—I remembered who I was, who I used to be and what makes me tick," said Brad. "I figured it was time to stop feeling sorry for ourselves and time to do some good for other people."







The support Brad had from the community was overwhelming.

The Ride for the Registry was meant for him to have some peace and quiet. Brad, who rode with his 13-year-old daughter Abby for most of it, wasn't looking for any fanfare. But from day one, it was impressive. The route, lined with people, was covered with burnt-orange rosettes in honour of Shannon, and children handed them carrots and apples for the horses.

"As the ride progressed, there was more media involvement. Then there were some big sponsorships that started coming in, including a donation of \$10,000," said Brad. "People were reaching into their pockets and throwing money at me. By the end of it, there was about \$50,000 that we donated to Hamilton's Juravinski Hospital. They ended up buying a flow cytometer that allows you to recognize cancer very quickly."

At the end of the ride, Brad and his brother rode their horses from Brad's home in Caledonia to the hospital, where they hand-delivered the cheque. Along the way, they passed thousands of orange bows on telephone poles and road signs. People came out to cheer.

Shannon passed away in January 2022.

Months after the family's loss, Brad, Abby and his youngest daughter, Emma, 11, are soldiering on and taking solace in the fact that they have helped others.

"When something like this happens, you can see the peripheral effects, like how much good was done through Shannon's life and will continue to be done through other people, and we find peace in that," said Brad, who returns to work in August. "Everywhere we look, we see the impact. We've received a lot of letters from people about how their lives were affected by what we did, about how they were going through hard times, but we gave them hope and courage."

Brad's work garnered him 90 nominations from the public for a Police Services Hero Award as a community role model. The honour was a special one for the sergeant.



Brad raised \$50,000 for the Juravinski Hospital in Hamilton.



"Out of any awards, rewards or recognition I've ever received in policing over my 25-year career, this one is the most meaningful because it directly relates to my family," said Brad. "I know Shannon would be so proud. She has always been my number one fan and she was always with me for the ups and downs. I know she would be ecstatic, and I know she'd make a pretty big deal out of it."

"I wish she could be here to see this, but she can look down from above," said Brad. "If I could have my whole life with Shannon back again, I'd reflect more on every moment and take everything more to heart. You have to appreciate every moment."

