

WARMINGTON

Chief on police force: 'There is work to do'



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TORONTO - On this dark day, there's not much that could put a smile on Chief Mark Saunders' face.

But sometimes a visit from an old friend is just what the doctor ordered.

Just hours after announcing four officers have been charged with obstruction and perjury, into his office walks someone Saunders considers to be the epitome of Toronto policing.

His name is Const. Donovan (Donny) Moss, and of all days, Thursday was his last as a Toronto Police officer.

"So this is it, Donny?" the chief said with a giant grin and a bear hug.

Saunders wasn't going to let the news of the day ruin this moment for an old friend.

"We knew each other when we both had hair," the chief joked.

Moss put in 34 years on the job. Saunders has 33 years and remembers well when the two were rookies.

"Donny always set the bar high for others," the chief said. "He really knows how to talk to people and always has the best smile."

Chief Saunders needed that. There hasn't been a lot to smile about.

But if the world was burning all around Saunders, as some were trying to suggest, he didn't show any beads of sweat. He certainly acknowledged it was a bad day, but he also put it in perspective.

"The days that may not be good days do not outnumber ... the fantastic days," he said calmly during an interview in his seventh-floor office.

He said his officers "save lives on a regular basis," are "courteous and respectful with people" and "do a fantastic job."

Officers like Donny Moss.

"I am very proud of him," Saunders said.

He said Moss is a reminder there are many more great days on the job than bad ones.

Still, Saunders knows Thursday was clearly not a fantastic day, especially on the heels of Monday's attempted murder conviction of Const. James Forcillo for the deadly shooting of Sammy Yatim, 18, on an empty streetcar on July 27, 2013.

"It certainly has been an anomaly week when it comes to our service," Saunders told reporters earlier. "We will do our best to get the public trust back that we have lost in certain ways."

Saunders' first duty Thursday was to report to the city that four of his officers had been charged with obstruction of justice and perjury in what the Toronto Police Professional Standards branch alleges was a deliberate planting of heroin in a car of a known drug dealer in 2014.

Moss, 58, said it was "shocking news" to be greeted with on his final shift, but he felt comfort that "Chief Saunders" was tackling it head on.

"He has the kind of experience you need and is the kind of leader to keep everything even and the morale up."

Saunders showed this leadership Thursday, as he did on Monday as well. On both occasions, when the news was disturbing for Toronto Police officers, he didn't hide or try to spin the ugly truth. He met with the media and answered every question. He knows this story isn't an allegation of a mistake on the job but accusations of criminal activity that goes against the very fabric of what a police officer is supposed to be.

His disappointment was clear, but sitting with a veteran copper about to retire, Saunders promised there will be adjustments.

"Joe, there is work to do," he said. "I have never said we should hang on to our laurels that we are a great service. A great service comes from the things you do when things go wrong."

There's lots wrong this week and Saunders says it won't be brushed under the carpet.

"What you do is get up and fix it," he said, adding the public will judge the results.

He said the repair work starts now.

TORONTO POLICE'S WEEK IN REVIEW


MONDAY

A jury found Const. James Forcillo not guilty of second-degree murder and manslaughter for the shooting death of Sammy Yatim, but guilty of attempted murder.

Forcillo fired three shots at Yatim, 18, as he stood on an empty streetcar waving a knife and taunting police on July 27, 2013.

Yatim was paralyzed and dying when Forcillo fired six more times.

TUESDAY

Chief Mark Saunders launched an internal investigation after high-profile lawyer Brian Greenspan accused police of  the Crown's advice when they charged a Brazilian soccer star with sex assault. The city's senior Crown withdrew the charge Tuesday because he determined there was no reasonable prospect for conviction.

WEDNESDAY

An officer who fired more than a dozen shots at a suspected stolen car in the Distillery District last fall was charged under the Police Services Act.

Const. Tash Baiati, a Canadian Forces reservist and veteran of the war in Afghanistan, was among several cops involved in a brief pursuit of the car on Sept. 16.

After officers used their cruisers to box in the Toyota Corolla at Parliament and Mill Sts., Baiati fired his service pistol into the car's engine. A bystander captured it on video.

THURSDAY

Four officers were charged with obstruction of justice and perjury.

Nguyen Son Tran was stopped for allegedly running a red light at Gerrard St. E. and Broadview Ave. on Jan. 15, 2014.

Officers claimed there was heroin powder on Tran's dashboard, which prompted a vehicle search that allegedly led to the discovery of 11 grams of the drug.

When the trial ended last fall, Judge Edward Morgan dismissed the charges against Tran and accused the officers of planting the drugs on the dash to justify the search and providing false testimony.