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**Crooked Brothers rock Haliburton**

The Crooked Brothers band member Matt Foster performs on Saturday, April 16 at the Northern Lights Performing Arts Pavilion in Haliburton. Presented by the Haliburton County Folk Society, the concert featured an energetic and foot-stomping style of music from the trio of Foster, Darwin Baker and Jesse Mantas, who played a variety of instruments (harmonica, banjo, guitar, mandolin and dobro). This was the Brothers' first Haliburton performance. More on page 10./DARREN LUM Staff

**County to appeal to ombudsman on OPP billing**

**CHAD INGRAM**  
Staff Reporter

Haliburton County will lodge a complaint with the Ontario ombudsman regarding the OPP billing formula, asking the ombudsman's office to review the billing framework that came into effect last year.

"I'm suggesting that we reach out to

the ombudsman," said Dysart et al Reeve Murray Fearrey during a special county council meeting April 13. "That's their responsibility, to capture complaints about Ontario government services and police is an Ontario government service. I think there's a case to be made."

Municipalities first found out about a new OPP billing system in late 2013, one that would redistribute total OPP costs on a per household basis throughout the

province. Because seasonal residences qualify as households, cottage communities such as the county's four lower-tier townships are watching their OPP bills skyrocket during a five-year phase-in period that began in 2015.

The county's collective policing bill will double from about \$3 million to more than \$6 million during the phase-in.

see LOBBYING page 2

**First  
responders  
welcome  
PTSD laws**

**ANGELICA INGRAM**  
Staff Reporter

Twenty-three years ago, Mike Landry's OPP partner was killed in the line of duty. That incident changed his life forever.

An OPP officer for 30 years, Landry retired from his policing career four years ago but is still involved in trauma-related work as a result of his experience.

"I was involved in some fairly stressful things, like most police officers are," said Landry. "Back then they had what was called a trauma support team and those were officers that were involved in traumatic events, would come and be peer supports for people involved in serious things."

After becoming acquainted with the group due to his own traumatic experience, Landry got involved with the program, which today is called the Critical Incident Stress Response Team.

Although he is retired, Landry continues to be involved in OPP work involving post-traumatic stress disorder, which came about through a recommendation by the provincial ombudsman a few years ago.

"What we do is act as peer supporters,"

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# New legislation eases access to help

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said Landry. "We call people who have been involved in serious things and we just talk to them and tell them what to expect in the way of stress that's related to post-traumatic [stress disorder]."

On April 5, the Ontario government passed new legislation that will allow first responders access to benefits and treatment for PTSD more quickly than in the past.

The new law no longer requires first responders to prove the disorder was caused by work, whereas it did in the past, causing delays, added stress and other issues.

According to the Ministry of Labour, "under the Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act, the presumption allows for faster access to WSIB benefits, resources and timely treatment. Once a first responder is diagnosed with PTSD by either a psychiatrist or a psychologist, the claims process to be eligible for WSIB benefits will be expedited, without the need to prove a causal link between PTSD and a workplace event."

The legislation applies to many in the field, including police officers, paramedics/EMS, firefighters, including volunteers, dispatchers and certain correctional institution workers and youth justice workers.

The change is welcome news for area first responders, who applaud the strides made in mental health and PTSD initiatives in the past number of years.

"I always tell people who I speak to ... there's going to be, over your career, a series of incidents that you will remember, every detail of that incident. Because it's a very traumatic thing," said Landry. "That's the thing with emergency services, we're thrown into horrific events all of a sudden and they can be hard to deal with."

Pat Kennedy, former director of the Haliburton County department of emergency services can relate, saying there are still calls he can remember to this day, ones that happened years ago.

"I hated to hear the phone ring," he said. "When I'm out somewhere and hear the same ringtone we used to have in the hall it still jars me. Certainly I had calls that haunted me for years. There are still two that do, 30 years later."

Retired since 2013, Kennedy worked in the field for 34 years and saw a lot of things, which led to the creation of a support group.

"In 2010, I started a chaplain program with the department. It was not to be a religious program but to be a support program," he said.

The group was opened to police officers, firefighters and nurses.

Kennedy wanted it to grow into a critical incident support team, but that never happened.

"This Bill 163 is really going to put the emphasis on departments developing programs," he said.

He says the new legislation is a good first step, however, it remains to be seen how it will roll out.

"It will be interesting to see what kind of programs will be developed," said Kennedy.

Signs of PTSD include shorter temper, mood swings, irritability, trouble sleeping, increased alcohol consumption and more, according to area department heads.

However, it is still difficult to pinpoint a diagnosis, which is made more difficult by individuals not wanting to admit an issue or seek help.

"It was always that 'suck it up, why are you doing this job if you can't handle it' attitude," said Kennedy. "Slowly society is getting that concept changed."

Craig Jones, who is the current EMS director for Haliburton County, says in the past there was a stigma surrounding the issue and this new legislation is helping to break down those barriers.

With close to 25 years of experience on the job, Jones was happy the legislation passed unanimously and believes it is part of a larger, provincial plan.

"I see it as a safety net, essentially, for those who fall through the cracks and need to get help," said Jones. "It just expedites the ability of them being able to get help."

Next steps forward include working with the government, so that these issues are dealt with before they become detrimental to one's mental health, he said.

Jones is optimistic about the strides made in mental health awareness overall and work done to reduce the stigma.

"I think it's an exciting time with respect to mental health in general," said Jones. "Mental health is an illness ... it's no different than having a broken bone."

Landry also applauds the strides taken by the government and hopes it will help first responders. He and others in the field believe the legislation will evolve over time, and hope it will one day include nurses and emergency room staff.



Paramedics, firefighters and police officers are almost always the first people to attend to traumatic situations, such as car accidents, seen here. The stress of the job can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). First responders are applauding the Ontario government's recent legislation changes, allowing them to get faster access to PTSD treatments and resources. /File photo

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*It was always that 'suck it up, why are you doing this job if you can't handle it' attitude. Slowly society is getting that concept changed.*

— Pat Kennedy  
former EMS director

Kennedy wants more education and awareness about the disorder to come down the road and is disappointed that the act doesn't recognize past PTSD claims that were denied.

"Folks who had this a number of years ago and tried to get it recognized ... are now left out completely," he said.

Landry said PTSD isn't something that just happens while you are an active first responder either, as he knows retired officers who have stress-related issues from incidents they were involved with.

"It's not something that just goes away when you're retired," said Landry.

Throughout his career the police officer worked throughout the province and can count how many of his colleagues committed suicide, which may or may not be connected to PTSD.

That number is four.

Along with full-time first responders, PTSD also occurs in those who volunteer for the job.

Dysart fire chief Miles Maughan said PTSD is just as likely to happen to volunteer firefighters as full-time ones, and sometimes the nature of a small community can make it even more prevalent.

"The stress is the same whether it's a full-time or a volunteer department," said Maughan. "It could be more in a volunteer department because we're dealing in a smaller community where you may actually be dealing with people you know, so it's even more stressful in situations like that."

Maughan says he has seen the effects of PTSD firsthand and points to calls involving children as a major trigger. Other times it's a buildup of calls that can take their toll.

"We try to debrief the people involved at the time and hopefully that helps," he said.

A debrief can involve just talking the incident through

and offering reassurance. The fire chief is happy to see the support the Ontario government is offering, as it means first responders will no longer have to fight to get WSIB coverage.

"They're going through a tough time to start with, without having to fight to get a wage," said Maughan.

The next step is to train fire chiefs and senior management to be able to recognize signs of PTSD and get first responders to admit to it, said Maughan.

Locally, training is happening in Haliburton County under the direction of Algonquin Highlands fire chief Mike Cavanagh.

"We're trying to train and prevent PTSD before it happens," said Cavanagh. "The Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs has started rolling out a program which is called the Road to Mental Health Readiness."

Originally developed by the Department of National Defence, the initiative has been adapted by fire and first responder departments.

According to Cavanagh, Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR) is a program designed to reduce stigma and address and promote mental health and resiliency in a first responder workplace setting.

"The program helps employees in creating a supportive environment, strengthening the organizational culture, and contributing to a healthy workplace," Cavanagh wrote in an email to the paper.

"R2MR teaches participants how to use the 'Big 4' — a set of evidenced-based, cognitive behavioural therapy techniques that help individuals cope with stress and improve their mental health and resiliency. The Big 4 are positive self-talk, visualization, tactical breathing, and smart goal setting."

Cavanagh said currently there is investigation into the creation of a peer support team amongst the county's fire departments. There will be training in regards to R2MR rolling out this summer, starting with the Algonquin Highlands fire department.

No matter what the call may involve or the effect it has on a person, department heads across the board agree that one of the best ways to deal with the effects of PTSD is to talk about it.

"In the 25 years I've been chief you have to convince people they need to talk about it," said Maughan.

Jones agrees and believes it is up to everyone to make sure first responders are taking care of themselves, and not just the general public.

"We want our people to go home healthy and happy every day," said Jones. "Come to work, do a great job, leave work at work, go home, be healthy, happy and enjoy your family."