Tenacious Crime-Fighter

CONSTABLE SAM PRIMERANO grew up in Vancouver, giving him deep roots and a strong connection to our city and its residents. In his 15 years with the Vancouver Police Department, he has dedicated himself to fighting crime, increasing public safety, and building positive relationships with the community. He has proven to be an exceptional police officer.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4
**Constables Fight Heat, Smoke and Flames to Rescue Residents of Burning Building**

**WHILE POLICE OFFICERS MENTALLY PREPARE**

for any number of emergencies that might come their way, encountering a life-threatening fire and rescuing residents from a burning building is not a common scenario they contemplate.

Constables John Gravengard and Tajinder Parmar were on routine patrol in the middle of a summer afternoon on August 27, 2014, when they observed thick smoke in the distance.

The officers followed the smoke to the 1200 block of Kingsway, where flames were engulfing the upper floor of an apartment building. Vancouver Fire and Rescue had not yet arrived and the officers radioed for back-up.

The pair smashed the glass on the front door and headed up the stairs. The smoke was making it difficult to see, and they could hear a man and woman screaming for help. On their hands and knees they continued, spotting the woman, but a wall of flames prevented them from reaching her. In another direction, they could see the male resident, and the officers yelled to him to exit the building.

“The worst part was the smoke,” says Constable Gravengard. “It was pitch-black – even the flashlight didn’t help.”

Constable Parmar was driving the patrol car – his first day behind the wheel, and only his second day on the job after graduating from the police academy.

“I could see dust clouds on some of the minor streets,” says Constable Cameron Mackay.

Constable Waraich was driving the patrol car to retrieve their fire extinguishers and headed back into the building. Unable to see, and with no one answering their calls, they assumed the pair had either escaped or succumbed to the fire.

As they retreated, crawling down the stairs, a portion of the ceiling fell on top of the officers. They were able to free themselves and get to safety.

“I asked myself what I was doing there,” says Constable Parmar. “It was such a dangerous situation, but I felt safe because I was with my partner.”

In the meantime, back-up had arrived.

“I’d never seen a place fully engulfed like that before,” says non-retired Constable Greg Bismeyer. “I thought it was pretty incredible Gravengard and Parmar went in—there were red hot flames flowing out of the doors.”

Bismeyer was joined by Constable Nicholas Thompson at the rear of the building. Hearing a voice, they tried to enter, but had to turn back because of the thick smoke.

“It was a surreal experience,” says Constable Thompson. “The heat and smoke were overwhelming.”

On hands and knees they tried again, and found the man trapped in the burning building by a locked metal gate. They tried in vain to force it open. The woman, who also escaped, gave them a key, so they could open the door and get the man to safety.

All the officers were treated for smoke inhalation. Constable Parmar suffered cuts and burns, and Constable Gravengard received a concussion.

For running into a burning building to rescue residents from serious injury or death, without concern for their own personal safety, and suffering injuries as a result, Constables Greg Bismeyer, John Gravengard, Tajinder Parmar and Nicholas Thompson were awarded the Chief Constable’s Commendation.

**Dedicated Duo Chase Down Armed Robber on Downtown Street**

**THERE ARE PEOPLE** in the world who are satisfied only doing what is required of them in any given day. But there are also people who insist on going beyond those expectations – who refuse to settle for anything less than their very best effort in whatever life throws their way.

It was July 22, 2015, when Constables Viet Hoang and Paul Hobbs were patrolling the end of their nightshift and their workweek. A robbery call came in, and despite working in a different district, they raced to the scene to assist.

The robber had reportedly held a gun to the head of one of his two victims in a downtown hotel room. The women had resisted his efforts, and quickly called 9-1-1 after the man fled.

Constables Hoang and Hobbs spotted the suspect from the description that had been provided, but the robber had also seen them. He hid and the foot chase was on, the officers keenly aware that their quarry was armed and dangerous.

“He had such a long head start,” says Constable Hoang. “But as long as he was in our sights, there was no way we were going to let him get away.”

During the chase, the man dropped the handgun, which was quickly retrieved by another officer at the scene.

“We were concerned that he may have another weapon,” says Constable Hobbs. “We knew the risk to the public and we just wanted to end this as quickly as possible.”

The chase came to an end in a busy intersection about two blocks from where it started. Though the man resisted and fought with the officers, putting himself, the public and the constables at risk, they were able to arrest him for his crimes.

For placing themselves in grave danger to pursue an armed suspect, and demonstrating admirable devotion to their duty, Constables Viet Hoang and Paul Hobbs were awarded the Chief Constable’s Commendation.

**Officers Stop Fleeing Homicide Suspect**

**TRAFFIC COLLISIONS ARE GENERALLY TO BE AVOIDED** at all costs, but in the early morning hours of August 9, 2012, a traffic collision likely saved lives and put a murderer behind bars.

Earlier the preceding evening, police made a grisly discovery when they found a recently murdered 57-year-old man savagely stabbed to death. The case seemed puzzling initially and was made more difficult by the lack of witnesses or video.

Constables Cameron Mackay and Inderjit Waraich were driving back to the crime scene after taking a break, when they saw a car they had linked to a possible suspect. They immediately began to follow the car, but the driver started driving recklessly in an attempt to avoid arrest. His actions were posing a high risk to the officers following him and to other cars and pedestrians.

“I could see dust clouds on some of the minor streets,” says Constable Cameron Mackay.

Constable Waraich was driving the patrol car – his first day behind the wheel, and only his second day on the job after graduating from the police academy.

“I just wanted to catch him and make sure he didn’t get away.”

Constable (now Sergeant) Rich Lee, a police dog handler, heard the call and knew there was an urgent need to stop the suspected murderer before he could hurt anyone else. Without regard for his own safety, he used his own car to stop the suspect vehicle, bringing the pursuit to a sudden stop.

Despite being injured in the crash, Constable Lee got out of his car with Police Service Dog Diesel to help make the arrest, ending the risk to the public.

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Constable Peter Andersen.

Constable Craig Look.

IT IS THE ANGUISH AND PAIN OF NOT KNOWING where your loved one or family member is, or what has happened to them, that drives people to the VPD’s Missing Persons Unit. Finding the answers to their questions and dealing compassionately with their anguish is the job of Detective Constable Raymond Payette. Few, if any, have ever done it better.

During his tenure with the Unit, 3,700 files have been reviewed annually. But more incredibly, the Unit has a clearance rate of 99.99 per cent.

Detective Constable Payette is known for his tireless work ethic, compassionate approach and investigative tenacity.

He understands that the successful conclusion of an investigation is key to ensuring the emotional needs and fears of the missing person’s family and friends are allayed.

“The volume of cases we investigate is difficult,” says Constable Payette, “but we know that every case is someone’s brother, sister, mom or dad. Having someone you care about go missing is a life-altering event for many people.”

Detective Constable Raymond Payette
Solves the Mysteries of the Missing

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His humane and caring approach has built bridges with community groups. A local counselling and support services society now welcomes investigators from the Missing Persons Unit to their youth outreach meetings, confident that the investigators act in the best interests of the youth.

He is recognized by the RCMP and police agencies throughout Canada as a subject matter expert in missing person’s investigations. No other VPD member has ever received this designation.

He shares that expertise at every opportunity as an active member of the advisory committee of the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, and as an instructor at the Citizens’ Police Academy.

“I was going to be a lawyer, but that didn’t work out,” says Payette. “I’m so glad, because I love my job. Twenty-two years and I have no regrets.”

For solving the many mysteries that haunt those left behind, and for his unassuming determination and commitment to duty, Detective Constable Raymond Payette was awarded the Chief Constable’s Commendation.

Young Man Intent on Ending his Life Rescued from False Creek

IMAGINE THE DESPERATION of a 17-year-old boy who is so intent on killing himself that he climbs over the outside railing of a bridge. A determined group of VPD officers were going to make sure he did not succeed.

Vancouver Police received a 9-1-1 call around 2:30 in the morning on May 28, 2015, reporting a young man mid-span on the Cambie Street Bridge on the outside of the railing. Two plainclothes officers were the first to arrive, speaking to the boy from a non-threatening distance, but he quickly let go and plunged into the water.

Sergeant Mark Christensen and Constable James Leishman raced down to the water’s edge, donned their personal flotation devices and headed into the chilly water.

“It took a while to reach him,” says Sergeant Mark Christensen. “You just keep focusing on what you’re doing.”

While the teen did not resist, he remained passive in their efforts to get him to safety. The officers had left their heavy-duty belts safely on shore with another officer, but they were still wearing their Kevlar vests and work boots, their weight only adding to the difficulty of their mission.

Constable Leishman was surprised the water was not as cold as he thought it would be. “But our equipment was heavy and it seemed to take so long to get to him.”

Constable Emily Ovington had finished her shift for the night, changed into her civilian clothes, and was headed down to the VPD parking lot. She was still listening to her police radio when she heard the call, and immediately rushed a short distance away to the shore.

“I actually heard the splash and I knew he’d gone into the water. I knew we had to get to him fast, as he might have a broken leg or pelvis.”

Constable Eric Jordan had also arrived, and the pair put on their life jackets and swam out to help their exhausted co-workers. “I used to be in the Marine Unit,” says Constable Jordan. “I’m used to being on the water, and I knew we would be struggling against the current to get him to shore.”

Constable Ovington had brought an additional flotation device, which they placed on the teen. She kept trying to engage him in conversation. “I figured he would be less likely to want to fight or drown one of us if I could keep him distracted.”

Very soon, additional officers arrived, and using a rope, they were able to pull everyone to shore. The young man was loaded into a waiting ambulance and taken to hospital.

For working as a team, rushing into chilly and contaminated water in the middle of the night to save the life of a distraught young man, and ensuring everyone returned to safety, the following officers were awarded the Chief Constable’s Unit Citation: Sergeant Mark Christensen, and Constables Eric Jordan, James Leishman, and Emily Ovington.

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One Wrong Move Could Mean Game Over

I just felt like there was no stopping – the wheels were in motion.”

MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE that policing is not a job, but a calling. We’ve all seen the images of police officers running toward what others are running from. They have a drive propelling them forward – part instinct, part training and part of who they are—despite danger, despite injury, despite personal risk.

In the morning hours of December 5, 2014, a man walked into a Surrey grocery store and stabbed one of the employees. He fled into the passenger seat of a vehicle parked outside. Brandishing a large butcher knife, he forced the man behind the wheel to drive.

They were pursued into Vancouver, followed from above by Air One, the police helicopter. Officers on the ground were following when the hostage suddenly stopped the car at W. 33rd and Cambie, jumped out and ran toward them. His captor chased him with the knife, but sensing the futility of his mission, he quickly got into the driver’s seat of the car. Officers attempted to box the car in, but the man was able to escape.

Constables Neil Logan and Simrit Roycombough took up the chase, uncertain if there were other hostages still in the car. Believing he was a significant threat to the public, they made the decision to use their police car to stop the getaway vehicle.

“What we knew we couldn’t let this guy get away and do it again,” says Constable Roycombough. “He needed to be stopped.”

As they collided, the suspect’s car left the road and went into some bushes. Constable Logan, who was driving the police car, was momentarily unconscious, and Constable Roycombough was trapped in his seat. When Logan awoke seconds later, he was instantly out the door and going chase to their fleeing suspect. Constable Roycombough managed to free himself and was close behind him.

What followed next was like a scene from a movie. The suspect ran into a fully operating industrial mill. The staff had fled so quickly that all of the moving saws and dangerous machinery were left powered on.

The noise in the mill was so loud that radio communication was almost useless.

Back-up officers arrived, including Dog Handler Constable Brian Lequesne and Police Service Dog Bailey. They spotted the suspect as he ran up to the second floor, with Constable Logan in hot pursuit. The struggle to make an arrest would move overhead of a wood chipper and the speckled belt moving underneath his feet—a fall onto either would result in certain death.

“One wrong move could mean game over,” says Constable Lequesne. “But we were relying on our training to get the job done safely.”

Other officers joined in, as the suspect kept trying to grab at PSD Bailey’s face and snout. Constable Logan suffered further injury when he was knocked off a platform, striking his head on the walkway below. Still he continued on, attempting to make the arrest.

“I just felt like there was no stopping – the wheels were in motion.”

Moments later, the officers finally succeeded in getting the man into handcuffs.

Constable Logan suffered numerous injuries, including a concussion, and spent four months receiving daily treatment at a concussion clinic.

For doggedly pursuing a dangerous suspect, despite serious injury and life-threatening danger, Constables Brian Lequesne, Neil Logan and Simrit Roycombough were awarded the Chief Constable’s Commendation.

WE LIVE IN A HIGH-TECH WORLD, with high-tech crime. It takes a certain type of police officer to combat criminals and terrorists who use cell phones and computers. At the VPD, those officers work in the Technological Crime Unit or TCU.

These digital forensic examiners and internet investigators have developed innovative policing techniques that have been recognized worldwide.

In 2007, Detective Constable Les Wray developed the investigative technique of using a virtual machine to copy a suspect’s seized hard drive so evidence could be viewed remotely by investigators. It’s a technique now used by police agencies all over the world.

Wray, who policed in Northern Ireland before coming to Canada, joined the VPD in 1993.

“I started with my first computer in 1983, and just kept building my skills. When I suggested ways we could be gathering more evidence from computer hard drives, my sergeant challenged me to do something about it. In 1999, I became the sole member of the brand new VPD Tech Crime Unit.”

The Tech Crime Unit has grown substantially since then, and Wray’s technique continues to be useful in identity theft and child pornography investigations, as well as homicides and other crimes.

In 2012, Detective Constable Mark Fenton developed a “web bug” that has since been used not just across Canada, but also globally, to locate suicidal people, terrorists, fugitives, pedophiles, and other hard-to-locate suspects.

As computers and cell phones improve their storage capacity, the workload of the TCU increases exponentially. They examined close to 800 exhibits in 2015.

“The Tech Crime Unit is the piece of the puzzle in modern policing,” says Sergeant Wayne Dowle. “The challenge is to keep up with the constant change in technology.”

For groundbreaking investigative techniques and long-term sustained performance at an expert level since 1999, CCTV and information overloads, the following members of the Technological Crime Unit were awarded the Chief Constable’s Unit Citation: Sergeant Wayne Dowle, and Detective Constables John Bjornson, Tom Callaghan, Mark Fenton, Tim Greenwood, John Pyper, Tim Ward, Les Wray and Nancy Yingling.

The VPD Tech Crime Unit is a Global Leader in Digital Crime Investigation.

Sergeant Wayne Dowle

Constable Les Wray

A Global Leader in Digital Crime Investigation

2015 POLICE OFFICER OF THE YEAR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

His ability to track crime trends and draw links between crimes and suspects, even between jurisdictions, has made him a valuable resource to the entire Department. Whether working in Patrol, in Strike Force, or in the Crime Unit, Sam constantly strives to learn new skills and hone his tactics. He coaches, mentors and shares his vast experience with other officers and, in turn, improves the abilities of those around him.

Sam’s many awards include one for Meritorious Service from the Lieutenant Governor for continuing a suicidal young man to drop his knife. He received a Chief Constable’s Commendation, not for a single incident, but for his collective noteworthy performance – including making 90 arrests in just three years with his Police Service Dog Lupo.

Constable Primeraano and Lupo are well known in the community, as Sam makes every effort to know the people he’s policing. His respectful and empathetic manner extends to the people he arrests, building a trust that has led to receiving valuable investigative tips.

“Honestly, the best part about my job is the people I work with and the relationships I’ve established,” says Constable Primeraano. “When I look at past recipients of this award, I feel honoured.”

Sam Primeraano is a tenacious crime-fighter and a natural leader, possessing initiative, a tireless work ethic and extraordinary police instincts. For continuously going beyond the call, improving the services the VPD provides to the public, and for making the city of Vancouver a safer place, Constable Sam Primeraano is the 2015 Police Officer of the Year.

BEYOND THE CALL 2015 POLICE OFFICER OF THE YEAR SAM PRIMERAANO

INVESTIGATIVE TIPS

1. Target customers:
   - The most obvious targets are people who drive expensive cars, wear designer clothing, or live in luxurious houses.
   - Phishers and scammers often target people who have recently inherited money or won a lottery.

2. Use a virtual machine to copy a suspect’s seized hard drive so evidence can be viewed remotely by investigators.

3. Dog handlers can be effective in situations where radio communication is useless.

4. Collaborate with other agencies and departments to share investigative tips.

5. Stay up-to-date with technology and trends in crime prevention.

6. Build relationships with the community to gain trust and cooperation.

7. Always be respectful and empathetic in your approach.

8. Keep trying to learn new skills and hone your tactics.

9. Continuously go beyond the call of duty to improve the services provided by the VPD.

10. Honor and respect the people you arrest and build a trust that will extend to valuable investigative tips.