

Local man honoured by police



From left, Peterborough Police Service police chief Murray Rodd shakes Dr. Hugh C. Russell's hand following a ceremony that named him the police service's honorary police chief May 14. / SUBMITTED

By Sarah Sobanski

Bancroft's safety and well-being committee advisor has been named the first Honorary Police Chief of the Peterborough Police Service.

The police service named Dr. Hugh C. Russell honorary chief as a part of Police Week May 13 to 19. The theme of the week was ?Celebrating Policing and Community Partnerships.?

Russell is now among a handful of honorary chiefs named in police services across the province. He said he laughed in disbelief

when Peterborough's police chief Murray Rodd first asked him if he would take on the title.

'It was a surprise, I had no idea,' he said. '[Rodd] rushed to reassure me, 'Oh don't worry, we'll get you a chief's uniform and everything.' And that just amazed me because I've never seen myself in that light... I said, 'Oh my gosh.''

Locals might better know Russell from area farmers' market events where he and his wife, Carol, can often be found selling jams, salts and vinegars from their Hastings Highlands business, Hillview Farm & Studios. Outside North Hastings however, Russell is known as a community justice consultant and social psychologist. He's consulted on crime prevention with justice leaders both nationally and internationally.

The Peterborough Police Service said, 'We have chosen Dr. Russell for this honour to recognize him for his significant contributions to the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police and policing in Ontario as a body of work.'

Russell said he felt the police service had chosen him to 'signal' to officers and their communities that policing is changing.

'Community policing is about more than cops getting out of their cars to be friendly, and passing out hot dogs. It's more about other community members doing things that would fall to police if the community didn't do them,' he said.

Russell outlines what he means in his book, *Transforming Community Policing: Mobilization, Engagement, and Collaboration*. After coming out in 2017, it's already being considered as a point of reference for college or university courses as police services evolve.

'We've learned that the social determinants of health are what's behind almost all the crime and social disorder,' he said explaining how he told program co-ordinators to offer community justice courses to grads outside of police foundations and law and justice. He said, 'Offer it to grads in public health, education, mental health and social work as well because when it comes right down to it, community safety and well-being is a whole-of-community enterprise.'

'It's not just a matter for police. We all have to get more fully involved in keeping everyone safe and healthy. If we don't, police are left holding the bag. They're not equipped to deal with many of these issues and we're not doing enough, the rest of us,' said Russell. He explained that communities need to work together with all of their agencies to reduce negative socioeconomic conditions such as underemployment, poverty and substandard housing. He said 65 to 80 per cent of police calls for service have 'nothing to do with chargeable offences.'

He added, 'The book pulls it altogether as an approach to making communities safer and healthier. It focuses on police because police really are our canaries in the coal mine. They tell us when we're not doing enough on things like housing, poverty, addictions and mental health.'