



# Stonewall stakeholders develop new policing model

by Terry Ross

**S**tonewall is the fastest growing town in Manitoba. From 1989 to 2003, the town's population actually doubled. Unfortunately, during that same period, Stonewall's RCMP contingent expanded by only a single officer. No wonder community leaders were concerned that there was less of a police presence in the area, since – on a per capita basis – that was the case.

As a result, in the spring of 2003, a meeting took place involving the RCMP, council and interested citizen groups. The facilitator for the meeting was Inspector Al O'Donnell, a veteran RCMP officer based out of the Winnipeg headquarters. According to Inspector O'Donnell, "I went into the meeting not knowing what to expect. Were the citizens irate at the RCMP? Did they want to end their relationship with us? How bad was it? I found that it wasn't an antagonistic situation at all. The town's leaders had some concerns and the RCMP detachment in Stonewall was more than willing to listen and work with the townspeople to improve things. In the end, everyone was basically on the same page."

Mayor Ross Thompson was involved in the process from the beginning and says he is "very pleased with the results." Ross describes the process by saying, "It was a strategic planning process whereby council, citizen groups and the RCMP decided what we collectively wanted from our police force. We decided on our priorities, what actions would achieve those priorities, and how those actions should be measured."

Sgt. Gerry Thomas heads the RCMP detachment in Stonewall. He says, "It was

a matter of getting the town and the force together to share information. Many requests made by the townspeople were already being carried out. We only had to make a few minor adjustments to their delivery. Foot patrols were increased during times when more people would be on the street, like during the summer's Quarry Days festival. This increased police visibility was one of the major concerns of the citizenry." He adds, "It was good for the force in that we targeted our resources to get a 'better bang for the buck,' while at the same time giving the folks of Stonewall what they wanted."

The LOGIC model used by Inspector O'Donnell is a simple method to get a community the police presence it wants. After a period of brainstorming, the citizen interest groups determined a series of GOALS for policing in their community. These included a higher police visibility in the municipality; an increased effort to combat drugs; a crackdown on reckless and impaired driving; and improved communication between the RCMP and the citizens.

Next, a series of ACTIVITIES was designed that would, hopefully, achieve the goals. An activity would be broken down into what was being done, with whom and for what reason. For example, under the goal of 'increased police visibility,' some of the activities decided upon were:

- increased foot patrols (especially during times of heightened activity);
- presence in local schools; and
- attendance and/or participation at community events such as sporting events and Chamber of Commerce activities.

Finally, a PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT strategy was designed for each activity to ensure that it was, in fact, doing what it was designed to do.

In the end, the model is a one-page snapshot of what the town is doing in the area of improving its policing (each activity listed on the one-page model has its own file, so details of the program are available). Interestingly, all the responsibility doesn't fall back on the RCMP. The business community takes a role and asks its members: What can we do to improve the situation? The school division asks the same question of its administrators, teachers, parents and students. Seniors, too, were asked to get proactive and name someone to represent them on the committee. According to Mayor Thompson, the message is: "We're all in this together, so we all have to do our share to make it work."

Inspector O'Donnell says of the experience, "It was quite positive. I was very impressed with the RCMP Consultative Group in Stonewall. There were no passengers. It was a very committed group and I believe they are seeing the results of their hard work."

The Consultative Group will meet again in the fall to assess the activities that were in place over the summer months. According to Sgt. Thomas, "We'll see what worked and what didn't work. We will always be fine-tuning the program. It's an ongoing process."

The group's performance measurement strategy is available for interested citizens to view at the RCMP office in Stonewall. ●