

# Constable to be semi-retired

## While he's in truck, daughter will be on beat

By Bob Massecar  
St. Thomas Bureau

ST. THOMAS — Beat cop Jack Johnston is about to trade his St. Thomas police badge for the steering wheel of a big tractor-trailer rig.

Johnston will doff his constable's uniform for the last time March 1, taking advantage of an early retirement program to launch a new cross-country driving career and complete his bachelor of arts studies at the University of Western Ontario.

But he will be leaving behind a legacy to his 29 years of police work. His daughter Laurie, 26, is a recruit with the Ingersoll police department.

Laurie, chosen in January from 131 applicants, had been considering following in her dad's footsteps for some time before taking the plunge.

He talked her out of it once in 1984 but now beams proudly as she prepares to enter a nine-week course at the Ontario Police College in Aylmer.

It was Johnston's example as a good policeman that drew Laurie's interest in police work as she grew up. "I've always been proud of him and when he realized how serious I was he supported me."

It wasn't the danger aspect of the job so much that prompted Johnston to try to change his daughter's mind. That element is there but he believes she can handle any of those potential problems.

"It can be nasty and she'll find that out for herself. There'll be a few times when she'll be in a tight spot and question her choice of occupation."

The real difficulties of police work, he said, are in the constant shift changes, working holidays such as Christmas when everyone else is off and fighting the boredom of slow, routine days. "It's more stressful being prepared and waiting for something terrible to happen but never going into battle."

As for the physical danger, Johnston said that in 29 years he never unholstered his revolver in the line of duty and only once had to use his nightstick. "It will really be more dangerous for me, statistically, driving on the highways in the truck than it was as a policeman."

His new career evolves from a long interest in trucking and a desire to keep busy. With retirement from the force creeping up, he decided six months ago to buy a used tractor unit and has been repairing it in his off-duty hours.

Some of those private hours were dedicated to a long-term project of

getting his bachelor of arts degree. Like trucking, it's been a long haul since 1978 taking only a couple of courses a year to gain two years' credits toward his sociology degree.

Graduation is three years away under his schedule but Johnston is confident he'll make it. "I enjoy the classes. There's no doubt the experience of my job has helped me in my social sciences course. Some of my good grades have come because I was able to draw from past incidents as a policeman."

He has been careful not to translate his life in uniform into specific advice for Laurie when she goes on patrol. The policies of the Ingersoll force may not be the same as in St. Thomas and following dad's tips could land her in hot water, he said.

Laurie gets her direction from a coach officer and knows that as the first female to be hired on the force she'll be under a microscope to prove herself.

Public service is in the blood of the Johnston family. Grandfather James Johnston was a St. Thomas fire chief and an uncle, Wayne Johnston, works as a firefighter.

"My main ambition," Laurie said, "is to be a good street cop. Like dad."

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Ingersoll police recruit Laurie Johnston adjusts the tie of her father, St. Thomas Constable Jack Johnston. Laurie has just started a career in police work, while Jack is about to retire after 29 years of it.