

Police chief explains role as CEO

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She wears a police uniform, but Wendy Southall says she is more chief executive officer than crime fighter.

And in an environment where police administrators are under increasing public and political pressure over growing budgets, that's just the way things should be, she says.

"As police chief, I am a CEO," said Niagara's top cop during a luncheon address at Club Roma Wednesday.

During her speech, hosted by the St. Catharines Chamber of Commerce, Southall said the skills to administer a modern police department are not developed using a "traditional police model" of advancement through the ranks.

Southall was a civilian when appointed chief in January. She served as a Toronto police constable briefly in the 1970s, but has worked mostly in administration ever since.

For years, Southall was administrator of the police services board, the civilian body governing the service and prior to being named chief was the NRP's chief administrative officer -- the civilian counterpart of the deputy chief.

Southall said her experience, while not typical of most police chiefs, provided the skills to meet the police board's financial expectations for the chief of police. She also said the public has not raised concerns about her background.

"When I talk to people, they rarely ask about my background," she said. "Instead, they will talk about their experiences with the police."

While her appointment defies the usual career route for a police chief, Southall insisted the job rarely involves operational matters directly.

"The chief does not routinely go out on calls for service. The chief doesn't regularly conduct investigations," Southall said.

While she might not have decades of operational experience, her senior staff does. And while the current senior staff does not have her background, they are already in training to improve their administrative skills.

For example, Superintendent Damian Parrent, Deputy Chief Donna Moody and Deputy Chief Gary Beaulieu -- have graduated from an "MBA-style" program at the University of Toronto's Joseph L. **Rotman** School of Management.

While Southall's focus is on administrative matters, she has the powers of a police officer and must complete training last attempted 30 years ago.

At present, Southall cannot carry a gun, but she expects to soon complete firearm and use-of-force training.