

York police officer fatally injured trying to make arrest

By Bill Rea

It should be a solemn and poignant scene at the Ray Twinney Recreation Complex in Newmarket today (Wednesday).

The funeral for Constable Robert Plunkett is slated to begin at 11 a.m.

Constable Plunkett, 43, a 22-year veteran with York Regional Police, was killed in the line of duty early Thursday morning while trying to make an arrest in Markham.

Constable Plunkett, a member of the Special Services Unit, was involved in investigating the theft of airbags from cars. Police Chief Armand La Barge told a press conference Thursday afternoon these thefts have been growing more common, with 43 being reported in York since January, many of them involving break-ins of vehicles, mainly Hondas, Acuras and Toyotas, as well as car thefts.

He added these air bags are sold to body shops, which can see profits from \$1,500 to \$2,000 by selling them.

Police reported plain-clothes surveillance officers spotted two Hondas (one white and one gold) leaving a Toronto address early Thursday and being driven to Markham. They believed the gold car might have been stolen, although its theft had not yet been reported.

They were driven to the area of Acot Crescent and Harvest Moon Drive in Markham, where the driver of the gold car was seen opening the door and apparently removing the air bag.

Officers moved in to make arrests at about 5 a.m., with Constable Plunkett approaching the driver's side door of the gold Honda. As he tried to make the arrest,

the driver of the car apparently put the car into reverse and drove it over a curb, across a lawn and through some shrubs, with Constable Plunkett trapped between the door and the body of the vehicle. The car hit a tree, and Constable Plunkett was apparently thrown from the vehicle as it continued to travel across the lawn. It was eventually rammed and stopped by a vehicle driven by another police officer.

The driver of the gold car tried to flee, but was quickly arrested. The driver of the white vehicle also tried to get away, but was soon captured as well.

Constable Plunkett was rushed to Scarborough Grace Hospital, where he died.

La Barge stressed Thursday they were still in the early stages of the investigation. "This investigation is still unfolding," he said.

Two Toronto men were charged as a result of the incident. Nadeem Jiwa, 19, was charged with manslaughter. Baseer Mohammed Yousafzai, 23, was charged with breach of recognizance, theft and possession of stolen property over \$5,000 and mischief to property over \$5,000. The two were remanded into custody, and

were scheduled to appear in court again today.

More charges might be added. Detective Sergeant Kevin Torrie of the homicide bureau told Thursday's press conference the charges were based on the evidence they had so far.

He added both suspects "are known to police."

"We do anticipate further charges will be laid against Mr. Jiwa," the chief said, adding Yousafzai will likely face additional charges too.

Lamenting the "loss of a fantastic police officer," La Barge called Constable Plunkett "a true hero."

"Rob and officers like him are true pillars of the community in which we

serve," he added.

"Unfortunately, policing is a dangerous profession," the chief observed.

Constable Plunkett joined York Regional Police in October 1985. He was a uniform officer in Richmond Hill and Markham, and also served several years as a tactical officer with the Emergency Response Unit. He was also a co-coordinator of the York Regional Police Law Enforcement Torch Run in the 1990s, and he was co-chair of the 2000 Ontario Special Olympic Spring Games, which were held in York.

Constable Plunkett is survived by his wife Sonja,

daughter Amanda and sons Jeffrey and Mathew.

"He was a very giving individual," La Barge said. "He's certainly going to be missed by this organization."

Police have also extended thanks to many individuals and agencies who offered assistance in the aftermath of the incident that led to Constable Plunkett's death.

The York Regional Police Association issued a statement of mourning Thursday over the death of Constable Plunkett.

"Rob was a valued member of our association and those who knew him personally over his 22-year career will miss him dearly," it said.

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