

# Making the force fit the city

The Toronto Police Service's drive for a diverse force is paying off — but some things still get lost in translation

BY SUZANNE MA

**T**ake it easy, buddy. Me no criminal."

It's a Thursday night, and Constable Chen Shen and his partner, Constable Aaron Akeson, have just pulled over a red sedan on Jane Street near Black Creek Drive. There's a warrant out for the driver's arrest.

"You're under arrest, do you understand that? You're under arrest for criminal harassment."

"What did I do?" the man asks.

The driver of the car speaks Spanish and has trouble understanding English. The officers radio their division. Tonight, it appears, Constable Shen won't be using his Mandarin-language skills.

About 15 minutes later, Constable Marcelo Rossi pulls up in his cruiser.

"Geez," Constable Rossi says after Constable Shen briefs him on the situation. "I don't know how to say criminal harassment in Spanish."

In an increasingly diverse city, Constable Shen and Constable Rossi are the faces of a changing police force. Constable Rossi, 31, a Latino who immigrated from Uruguay when he was a year old, has been with the force for just under a year. Constable Chen, 31, an immigrant from China, graduated in May from the Ontario Police College.

In his class of 140 recruits, Constable Shen was one among 33 members of visible minorities, many of them recruited through aggressive campaigns that targeted the city's diverse ethnic communities. The Toronto Police Service says it is looking for officers just like Constables Shen and Rossi, women and men with a multiplicity of language and cultural skills. And since 2000, the percentage of members of visible minorities in the TPS has grown by 44 per cent.

At 31 Division, where the two constables are stationed, 96 of the 376 officers speak a total of 29 languages, including Chinese, Arabic, Creole, Dutch, Farsi, Gujarati, Greek, Hindi, Korean, Italian, Spanish and Ukrainian. It comes in

handy: Constable Rossi estimates he has used his Spanish on the job at least 15 times since he joined the force.

But TPS still has a long way to go. Just 14 per cent out of the city's more than 5,500 officers are members of visible minorities.

Constable Rossi begins his translation and the Spanish-speaking driver seems to understand, nodding his head. But then the word "harassment" comes out in stark English. The detained man, whose brow drips with sweat, looks confused.

Constable Rossi pauses and re-groups. "Okay," he breathes, coming up with another approach. Using his fingers as counters, he gives three examples of various acts that might be considered harassment.

It must be his ex-wife, the man immediately responds. She's the only person who would accuse him of this.

Constable Shen hadn't planned on becoming a cop. He was a computer programmer in Beijing before he came to Canada in 2001 to complete a master of computer science degree at Dalhousie University. But he cut his studies short to move to Toronto when his wife, a nurse at Mount Sinai Hospital, became pregnant in 2003. Here, despite his education, he could only find odd jobs such as delivering pizza and working as a security guard. Until he saw a commercial on a Chinese-language television channel that changed his life — a call for Chinese-Canadian civilians to apply for the Toronto Police Service.

Similar campaigns have been turning up across the city in community newspapers and on ethnic television programs. The TPS also has regularly scheduled community events to garner more interest among women, aboriginals, blacks, and the gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered community. In July, the force invited members of the South Asian community to participate in a cricket match. These recruitment drives are helping the TPS compete with the OPP, RCMP and other local forces who are also courting recruits from under-repre-



FERNANDO MORALES/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

**Trained as a programmer, Constable Chen Shen was delivering pizzas before he signed up for the force.**

sented groups.

Still, only an estimated 100 of the service's officers are of Chinese descent — less than 1 per cent of the force, in a city that's more than 10 per cent Chinese. During Constable Shen's first week of field training he was called across town to Scarborough. A group of teenagers had robbed an elderly Chinese woman, but both she and a man who had witnessed the crime spoke only Chinese.

"When I walked in the room . . . I could see both of them sit up, and their faces changed," Constable Shen recalls. "They opened up, not just about this incident but about previous street robberies that they never reported because of the language barriers."

Constable Shen was able to get a description of the teenagers, and officers in Scarborough matched those descriptions to a number of

suspects.

Given the need for Mandarin-speaking officers in parts of Scarborough and other Chinese pockets of the city, Constable Shen was initially surprised to be assigned to Jane-Finch, a neighbourhood widely seen as a primarily black community. But he soon found out that the neighbourhood is home to people from more than 80 countries; in addition to the large African-Canadian community, there are deeply rooted Italian, Vietnamese and Portuguese populations too.

Jane-Finch's reputation for gun and gang violence, Constable Shen says, is an unfair characterization of the community as a whole. "Before I came down here, I expected the entire area to be problematic. But what surprised me the most is how quickly the neighbourhood [can] change," he says. "You can see the problematic buildings, but five

minutes down the same street, you can see really nice neighbourhoods — nice houses, nice backyards."

Back on Jane Street, Constable Rossi puts the man from the red sedan into the back of his cruiser, and Constables Shen and Akeson follow them back to 31 Division.

When they arrive, Constable Rossi tries to lend the man a hand.

"Don't touch me," he growls in Spanish, ignoring the policeman's outstretched hand.

Constables Rossi and Chen know that they won't always be doing the kind of work that earns them praise and thanks. Still, it's a mission accomplished for both officers.

"[My family] sees it as amazing," Constable Shen says. "At the beginning, they didn't think it was possible for a Chinese to be a police officer in Canada because my first language is not English. But I'm here, I made it."



## THE GOING RATE

### ON-LINE DATING

**How much do you spend on on-line dating?**

*Everyone and their uncle has a Lavalife profile these days, but the cost of e-flirting can add up. Can you put a price on love?*

**Bachelor:** Andrew Reeves, 26, marketing project manager, the Annex

**Average amount per month:** \$12

**Number of first dates:** 4

**Number of second dates:** 3

"I've been on Lavalife for six months, on and off. It's good for meeting people outside of my core group of friends. Women have contacted me and sent me their Backstage Pass — their pictures — but generally if you receive a Smile from a female, which is free, it's the man's move to send the initial message, which costs six credits, or about two bucks. I've learned that a lot of attractive girls don't post their profiles publicly, because they get bombarded by men. They may receive 100 smiles a day, so it's important to really differentiate. When I'm active and searching, I'll check in a couple times a day, for a total of maybe 15 to 20 minutes."

**Bachelorette:** Christina Veneracion, 25, graduate student, Etobicoke

**Average amount per month:** \$0

**Number of first dates:** 3

**Number of second dates:** 3

"I've only been dating on-line for about a month, but I literally spend zero dollars. If guys contact you first, it's free to respond, so there's no reason to pay anything. The majority of my female friends don't pay. I'll send a Smile and if there's no response, then it's not worth it. I don't think I ev-