

# Owning the Real Estate With Your Eyes Before Paying For It With Your Body

One of the fastest growing cities north of the U.S. border is Barrie in southern Ontario. In the last five years, the city has added nearly 20,000 residents to reach a total population of 150,000. To meet the demands of its robust population growth, the city even annexed 2000 acres from a neighboring town in 2010.

Sergeant Rich Johnston has been with the Barrie Police Service since 1998 and his responsibilities have evolved in step with the growth of its Tactical Support Unit (TSU). The TSU was established in 1999 as a base level or containment-level unit. With additional training, it became a tactical level team and, in 2006, achieved status as a full-time team with hostage rescue capability.

Johnston started as a tactical operator, became a team leader in 2004 and was promoted to sergeant in 2009. He describes the TSU's operational philosophy with this simple but eloquent phrase: "Own the real estate with your eyes before paying for it with your body."

In addition to adhering to a doctrine of risk adversity, Johnston commends a Canadian willingness to invest in technologies that help the TSU operate more effectively and safely. "Police forces in Canada have no problem spending funds to reduce personal risk to law officers," says Johnston. These same principles led to Barrie PD's acquisition of its Recon Scout XT in 2010.

In 2009, Johnston and his team were looking for a tactical robot when they saw the Recon Scout® robot at the National Tactical Officers Association show. They immediately focused on what made it unique. "It's simple and it's durable, but most of all, it's functional," he explains. "This salesperson from another company was trying to talk us into another robot – a larger tank-like thing with treads – and we were like, 'But it's not functional. It's so big and heavy. What are you going to use it for? You can't even throw it.' A tactical tool has to be useful. It has to meet the everyday needs of your team."

Today, the members of the Barrie TSU - twelve operators, two sergeants and one staff sergeant – "are all very familiar with the Recon Scout XT," says Johnston. They regularly train with the XT and, as Johnston recalls, within a week or two of having it, the TSU used the robot on a tactical operation.

"There was a known gang affiliate, a gang member, who had an extensive criminal record, which included violence and firearms," says Johnston. "We had an arrest warrant, but we had no desire whatsoever to just go in. We don't do high-risk warrant service for that type of situation. Instead, we do what's called a 'Contain and Call Out'. So we set up on the house, and right away notice the electronic surveillance on the outside. We figure that he knows we're out there, so we breached the door and called to him. We got no response, so we chucked in the Recon Scout and used it to canvas the entire main floor. Once we knew the main floor was clear, we approached the basement door. It was completely dark down there, so I just threw the robot down a long flight of stairs. The robot hits the bottom, and begins rolling right away. The IR activated and we thoroughly searched the entire basement level. Only then did we follow it up with personnel. As I said, 'we put bodies into the real estate only after we have owned it with our eyes.'"

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*–Sgt. Rich Johnston*



There are situations where the Recon Scout clears much but not all of a structure. In such circumstances, Johnston says that the robot allows the TSU to focus its attention on the area that the robot is watching. Johnston describes one such call out in which a male with mental health issues was barricaded in a house.

"Our guys went out there and were able to get inside of his place, but they couldn't find him," says Johnston. "They wheeled the robot around the entire place, but they couldn't get into one spot because it was obstructed. So, they left the camera focused on that area, and the team moved in. We located the subject right where the robot was looking. He was hiding in there with a knife."

For the Barrie Police Service, where team members operate in a risk adverse environment, "owning the real estate with their eyes before paying for it with their bodies" is paramount, and the Recon Scout is indispensable. "It gives you the knowledge of what the layout is *before* you actually put your body in harm's way," says Johnston.

## Summary

<b>Agency:</b>	Barrie Police Service, Barrie, Ontario
<b>Population Served</b>	150,000
<b>Objective</b>	Protect tactical operators with greater situational awareness and standoff distance
<b>Solution</b>	Utilize the Recon Scout XT <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ability to visually own the real estate during high-risk operations</li><li>• Simple, durable and extremely functional</li><li>• Ability to watch areas of focus as the team makes entry</li></ul>