

Spotlight on Officer Christopher Johnson

Contributed by Angela Chartier
Friday, 21 November 2008

Public Safety is an invaluable service provided to LSSU students. Public safety responds to assault, parking, alcohol, larceny, and all other issues regarding the well-being of the campus students. One of the friendly faces of this awesome force is Officer Christopher Johnson.

Officer Johnson is more than familiar with Sault Ste. Marie. He is a life-long native, born and bred in the quaint, friendly, portage town. Following his graduation from Sault Area High School in 1984 with merit certificates in cabinetry, auto-mechanics, and carpentry, Officer Johnson attended Lake Superior State University. In 1989, he graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Criminal Justice/Conservation Law Enforcement for the State of Michigan. In addition, he earned a Police Officer Certification and Associates Degree in Natural Resources Technology.

Following graduation from LSSU, Officer Johnson returned to campus not as a student, but as an employee. Initially, he planned to work in his Natural Resources Technology field, and applied to National Forests throughout the United States. However, he had also applied to Lake State. The timing was right, and he was accepted into the Public Safety Office of the campus. He decided that this was really where he wanted to be. Not only did he love the area as a native, and the college from his schooling, but he found how much he truly enjoyed helping the students. Lake State was "part of his blood", and he really wanted to make the effort to reach out and help the students, not just discipline them. In addition, the Sault had, and still does have, everything he needed. As an avid outdoorsman, he enjoys hunting, fishing, and camping. The area is so friendly and beautiful. Everything fits his personal tastes. Officer Johnson has been employed by Lake State for over 19 years! He has been here in his department, serving LSSU longer than anyone on the current staff.

Officer Johnson has also had some interesting experiences over the years. As part of the National Forestry, he helped fight the Yellowstone forest fires in "88, the largest forest-fire tragedy in the U.S. to date, with more than one million acres caught ablaze. Firefighters were recruited from all across the country. This county formed four crews of firefighters to help the cause. He was part of the Hiawatha Number 4 crew, and fought the fires in Yellowstone for a full month, putting in 12-hour days. It was a very dangerous task, and on more than one occasion, he had to be rescued and pulled out by helicopter. It was formidable work, but he loved it. He considered it more of a duty, and didn't even take into account the risks. He knew that he could die, but risk was never that critical in his mind. He was there for a purpose, and just wanted to serve his duty.

As well as protecting our nation's forest lands, Officer Johnson has received training for knowing, understanding, and responding to Terrorist Bombing Incidents. He has also worked for the Chippewa County Sheriff's Department and is a Certified Deputy. He served waterway patrol for the Marine Division, and also worked in search-and-rescue operations. He has also served our community's public safety in several other forms, such as transporting prisoners, and traffic patrol.

Officer Johnson has an extremely impressive resume. Lake State is fortunate to have such an experienced and concerned person as part of their Public Safety force. He feels that the main idea of Public Safety is not to be viewed as the "bad guys" that try to ruin parties, write out excessive parking tickets, or give you a criminal record. Rather, if a student is willing to cooperate, they may not be so severely penalized. He does not want these young adults to have a criminal record following them the rest of their lives.

"That's how it should be. Students are here to grow up and get an education. They are living in a controlled environment, and we can help them do that by being fair but firm, and using proper discretion. Parking tickets and other penalties are not enjoyable to issue, but it is part of his job. He is required to discipline when the situation calls for it. It can't be fun and games all the time, but more often than not, the Public Safety is concerned for the well-being of the students, and does not want to give them unnecessary negative consequences. The more cooperative the student is, the better the chance for a lesser punishment.

Being an officer is part of his blood. His father worked for the local Sault PD for 28 years. Following his retirement from the police department, he served the US Customs for 9 years. All of his life, he has been around cops. He loves his job and its variety. Every year there are fresh faces, different cultures, and new personalities. Helping the students is his passion and excitement. Officers and caring individuals like Officer Johnson are what make LSSU and the Sault area a pleasant, safe, and special place to live and work.