

Very Important People

We see them on every school day, no matter the weather, in their Day-Glo parkas and their summer vests, shepherding children through busy intersections all over Brighton. They are the School Crossing Guards, a part of the Patrol Operations Division of the Brighton Police Department, and in 2026 they will mark seventy-five years of serving the community.

At the 10 January 1951, Brighton Town Board meeting, the members voted unanimously to maintain a staff of five "Women School Traffic Guards," under the aegis of the Chief of Police. By the 23 February 1951 meeting, specifications for the position included salary (\$450 a year) and uniform to be furnished by the town: "Headgear and badge, coat badge, blue coat or blouse (brass buttons – traffic insignia on left sleeve), blue skirt (13" from ground), two white shirts, black necktie, white Sam Brown Belt and raincoat."

At the 22 March town board meeting, four women were officially appointed Special Women Traffic Guards for a probationary period of ninety days: Rosemary Klee of Varinna Drive, Dorothy Uebelacker of Bronx Drive, Harriet Petrie of Northumberland Road, and Lilian Cass of Forest Hills Road. Ann Scherwin of Westland Avenue joined the group in June, 1951. A. Ruth Kingsley of Klink Road replaced Rosemary Klee in September of 1951. The women covered four school crossings: District #4 on West Henrietta Road, District #1 at Winton and Elmwood, District #6 on East Avenue near Allens Creek School, and District #7, Indian Landing School, but not until June 1951 because there was a delay in the delivery of their uniforms.

By 1966, eleven crossing guards were working throughout the town, many with years of service under their Sam Brown belts. Occasionally they were pressed into service for auxiliary duty. In November of 1954, after a particularly close national election, Governor Thomas E. Dewey ordered that all voting machines in the state be guarded in advance of a recount of the results. Brighton Police Chief Vincent Conklin deputized eleven volunteer firemen to guard the machines in Brighton's districts and authorized the crossing guards to replace the volunteers during lunch breaks. Other non-traffic duties included the dog census in February of 1957.

Once appointed, crossing guards tended to retain their positions for years. Harriet Petrie, an original member of the corps, crossed children for twenty years at the Brooklawn Drive/Monroe Avenue crossing. A. Ruth Kingsley was stationed at Allens Creek School on East Avenue for twenty-six years. Her daughter, Beverly Kingsley Wedel of Dorking Road, manned the Terrain Drive/Edgewood Avenue crossing for many years. At the ten year mark, interviewed by the Brighton-Pittsford Post, she said with a grin "I'm like a mailbox. I'm a permanent fixture on this road."

Carol Germuga of 51 Hartfeld Drive served Indian Landing School crossers for twenty years at Forest Hills Road and Landing Road. Three months after her retirement in 1988, the town board took up consideration of a traffic light at that intersection, citing the large number of pedestrians that cross outside of school hours.

At some point the requirement that crossing guards be married women and mothers was dropped for, by 2004, men had joined the ranks. Ed McGee of East Rochester, a retired Monroe County Sheriff's Office sergeant, arrived at the Monroe and Elmwood Avenues crosswalk at 7:45 each morning. According to Capt. Jose Caraballo, head of the Patrol Operations Division, there are currently thirteen crossing guards, nine women and four men, who staff positions at the Twelve Corners, Brighton High School, Monroe Avenue, Landing Road North, and French Road/Edgewood Avenue.

For seventy-five years, the traffic guards have maintained a perfect record of safely crossing children to and from school in all types of weather.

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Town of Brighton Historian

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