



Where have they gone?

Police departments witness part-time officer shortages

By Julia Wolf
Record Review Intern

Area police departments have been struggling to retain their part-time officers, and local police chiefs say that the number of applicants for the vacant positions have declined over the past few years. Training the new hires only to see them move to a different department has challenged local departments resources.

Aaron Stencil, Athens police chief, said he has seen most of the part-time officers hired in the village leave within a year. "You train them and then they are gone," he said. Stencil said the Athens department trains new hires for a few months before they are on their own. He said they often work by themselves only a couple of months, or even days, before they are hired for a full-time position somewhere else.

"It's costly," Marathon City police chief Kory Gertschen said. The department pays the costs to get the new officers trained by a Field Training Officer (FTO) for 90 days, he said. He said it is also a big time and effort commitment for the department. "You learn 75 percent of this job doing the job," Gertschen said. He said the learning curve new recruits face working with the court systems can also cause budget issues with court costs and attorney fees.

The village of Athens is in discussion on how to cope with the speed and frequency of part-time officers moving on to other departments, Stencil said. He said he is looking into what other agencies are doing to encourage retention. Stencil said some of the agencies are not using any part-time officers, and



IN A QUANDRY—Stratford Police Chief Tim Miller stands in front of his department's squad car. Local police departments, including Stratford, are finding it difficult to hire and keep part-time police officers.
STAFF PHOTO/JULIA WOLF

are relying fully on full-time employees. He said he thinks many new officers are using part-time positions as a stepping-stone to gain experience for a full-time position.

Stencil said some of the part-time officers work two or three part-time jobs to supplement their income.

Gertschen said he has seen part-time officers who also have a full-time job elsewhere.

Tim Miller, Stratford police chief, said he thinks hiring a second full-time officer will help with his department's issue of retaining officers. He said he has been talking to other departments to try to avoid the problems with retention they are facing.

Gertschen said there has

been discussion in his department revolving around the question "Are we better off with a third full-time person?" The Marathon City Police Department currently has four part-time officers and two of them are in the hiring process with departments elsewhere. He said one of those two has been on the department for less than one year and the other for only five months. "We hire these people knowing they are looking for full-time work," Gertschen said.

The number of applicants for the open positions has also declined. Stencil said he has seen the decrease in applications for the past few years. He said potential em-

ployees used to hear about job openings by word of mouth through colleges or other police officers. "That has kind of dwindled," Stencil said. The Athens police Department has also received fewer inquiries, he said.

"Right now there are just not many applicants," Gertschen said. He said his department has also seen a decline in application numbers during the past two years. People used to call all of the time looking for openings, Gertschen said. He said he used to have 15-20 resumes and applications sitting on his desk, now he is lucky if he has one or two. He said he has heard other agencies having the same difficulty. Openings

Police shortage

Continued from page 1

that used to get 100 plus applicants are lucky to get double digits now, he said.

Miller said that he was going through his first hiring process as chief, so he does not have anything to compare with the current number of applicants. He said he has gotten quite a few applications, but that most of the applicants have very little experience.

Chad Billeb, the Marathon County police chief, said the county has also seen fewer applications than they did for similar positions five years ago. He said the county has not had quite as much difficulty as smaller towns. The county is a bigger department and offers opportunities that can lure some of the best officers away from smaller agencies, Billeb said.

Brian Fiene, a professor of police science at Northcentral Technical College, said enrollment in the police science program has gone down slightly.

Fiene said the police science program normally has 12-16 students in the certification track, but the track has only had seven to nine students the past few semesters. "I don't know if we have reached the bottom," he said.

Fiene said the class that is graduating from the certification program in

May 2017 has 20 students in it, so overall the number of students in the program has not gone down significantly.

There is a combination of reasons why fewer students are entering the program, Fiene said. He said a number of students are taking advantage of NTC's transfer agreements to switch to a four year program. Fiene says the program also sees a good amount of turnover, most commonly between the first and second semester, where students decide that the program is not for them. He also said he thinks the negative publicity in the media plays a part in students' decisions not to become police officers.

Billeb attributed part of the sudden decrease in the number of applicants at his and other departments to a shift in the perception of policing. He said the media plays a large role in shaping perceptions of police officers. "The 'Ferguson effect' has started to occur," Billeb said. He said he sees the negative portrayal of police officers slowly reversing itself, especially on social media.

Gertschen agreed that the events on the news the past few years has played a big role in reducing the number of

people who are considering policing as a career. He also thought the recent change made by the Department of Justice to the time requirements for recruiting school could deter students from considering the profession.

Billeb said the Marathon County Sheriff's Department has partnered with DC Everest Senior High for a criminal justice class. He said the students were shown how special teams and dispatch operated. Billeb said the agency is hoping the partnership will encourage some of those students to consider a career in law enforcement.

The new hour requirements increased the number of hours students must spend in recruiting school from 520 to 720 and stretched the program an additional three weeks, according to the Wisconsin Department of Justice website. The new requirements went into effect on January 1, 2016.

The increase in hours costs more for students because it is more time in school, Fiene said. He said it also has the potential to put additional costs for lodging and food on those who come to recruit school from out of town.

The Wisconsin Chiefs of Police As-

sociation (WCPA) has heard from police chiefs across the state that they have had trouble retaining part-time officers the last two years or so, Bob Rosch, the president of the organization, said. "We all kind of face the same challenges."

Rosch also said the increase in hours mandated in recruit school is one of the topics they plan to discuss. He said the longer period of time in school raises the cost of the schooling, making it harder for students to sponsor themselves through it. Rosch said some students look for a job with an agency to sponsor them through recruit school. He said agencies who rely primarily on part-time officers struggle to sponsor students through recruit school, since the officers are gone for the 18 weeks of classes.

Rosch said the WCPA will meet with members of the Training and Standards Bureau, part of the Department of Justice, next week to have a "brainstorming session" to discuss the reasons departments across the state are having trouble retaining part-time officers and potential solutions to the problem.

Persian Gulf welcome home festivities slated to begin

For the past several decades, this nation has sent men and women to serve in the Middle East and Persian Gulf region. Thousands of these military men and women have lost their lives while serving. Thousands more have returned home with physical and psychological scars.

For some, the mental preparedness that kept them and those around them safe during multiple combat tours has hardened and has become a hindrance to resuming relationships and stepping back into the life "back home."

To address these issues and more, The Highground Veterans Memorial Park near Neillsville will hold Operation Persian Gulf Welcome Home, July 19-25. This event will have far-reaching and long lasting effects.

During the Welcome Home, the men and women who have served and those currently serving will be honored. Families and friends will join together at the Highground to honor and remember the sons, daughters, husbands, wives, brothers and sisters in arms who lost their lives on distant foreign soil and, also, those

whose lives were lost after returning home because of their service.

Each day of the Welcome Home will be filled with ceremonies, displays, speakers and informational booths for veterans, families and all who support them.

The event begins with a 250-mile escort of The Wall of Remembrance from Madison on July 18.

Daily ceremonies will focus on separate combat regions (Desert Storm, Iraq and Afghanistan) and topics. Welcome Home speakers include combat veterans, community

members and Gold Star mothers and fathers.

Many musical artists will be performing free of charge including Madison Rising, Keith Pulvermacher, Maggie Mae Hilliard and Vets for Freedom.

Special guest speakers include Bobby Henline and Shilo Harris, veterans physically wounded during their service in Operation Iraqi Freedom, will be speaking to help other veterans and their families cope with difficulties they may be encountering.