

Marshal defends schedule of part-time department

Written by Mark Jaeger

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Davel says he wishes he could give officers even more overlapping shifts

Criticism voiced in an anonymous letter to the Fredonia Village Board had officials at a recent meeting coming to the defense of the village marshal's office.

The letter, signed "Concerned Fredonia Citizens," questioned the part-time department's practice of scheduling overlapping shifts for officers on patrol.

"My neighbors and I have noted that there are many instances when two village patrol cars are on duty at the same time. We've seen them in our neighborhood together and also sometimes on different ends of the town," the letter-writers said.

"A lot of time this is during the day or early morning when there is absolutely nothing going on in the village. I sincerely hope that the board is reviewing the hours that these multiple officers work and this it is not just a free for all for them to put in extra hours."

The letter sharply criticized staffing levels during difficult financial times.

"Most communities are laying off officers or cutting back on hours, and we seem to have a vast multitude of officers doing nothing," the writers said.

The village's policy is to ignore unsigned letters, but Village Marshal Mike Davel could not help but respond to the criticisms.

"Letters like this are received by every municipality. Police operations are prone to these types of complaints, due to the nature of our interaction with citizens and a general lack of understanding of police operations," Davel wrote in response.

"The fact that the village has received only one letter like this in the last five years is more remarkable than the letter itself. I firmly believe that people with good intentions and a desire to seek information will identify themselves. The unsigned letter leads me to believe the real purpose of the letter is not to raise a valid issue, but instead, to cause an issue."

Davel said he is more concerned that the part-time nature of the department means he seldom has the opportunity to schedule more than one officer on a shift.

Two officers are occasionally scheduled during times when incidents are more likely to occur, he said.

"I don't know what this person means by 'nothing going on,' and in fact I can't accurately predict when something will be going on. What I can do is look at activity levels and plan for the increased likelihood of activity during particular times of the day," Davel said.

Even during those times when two deputy marshals are on duty, Davel said, the village's police-staffing level is far below the state average of 1.95 officers per 1,000 residents.

In previous discussions with the Village Board, Davel has repeatedly said that his office is

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protecting the community, not raising revenue.

However, he said the department has more than tripled its annual revenue during his tenure, to about \$10,000.

Trustee Fritz Buchholtz said he too has heard criticism of the department's scheduling.

"The perception is out there that we have officers on duty when we don't need them, and don't have them when we do need them," Buchholtz said.

Several trustees said they would like to see the duty schedule for the marshal's office, although Davel has said he doesn't think that schedule should be made public.