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Despite being target of criticism, police chief will not change low profile

By Douglas A. Moser

Staff writer

Police Chief John Beaudette admits he is not a back slapper and keeps a low profile.

"I go to the events I'm expected to, but I prefer to be working behind the scenes," he said.

When Mayor John Bell made Beaudette his chief of police on Nov. 10, 2004, Bell was facing shrinking revenue and skyrocketing expenditures. One of the key administrative skills he was looking for was the ability to keep the police force living within a budget.

"The business aspect of policing, which John is very articulate on, has been very important these last few years," Bell said. "In terms of understanding how to run a budget with fewer dollars and watching every penny in the department, I think he's done a very good job at that."

Beaudette formally took over Jan. 1, 2005, for interim Chief Michael McLeod, who campaigned and was elected to City Council that year and is now running for mayor.

"We ask for a fair budget and we have to live with what we get," said Beaudette, who also has 30 years of business experience in real estate. "I think that was one of the strong points during the interview process for chief."

Beaudette said his style is markedly different from former Chief James Marr, who retired in February 2003 and "was more hands-on. ... He wanted to be involved in everything."

In contrast, Beaudette said he delegates authority to several of his lieutenants: Joseph Aiello is head of operations, Kathy Auld is the administrative officer and Michael Lane heads the detectives division.

"Although he appreciates he has to take responsibility for running the department day-to-day, he has expressed a great willingness to delegate and build leaders in the department," Bell said. "His first move was to immediately promote his competition (for chief), Mike Lane and Joe Aiello, into prominent leadership positions."

Beaudette's low-key style has left him open to criticism. His brief tenure has been marked with controversy and tension. The Gloucester Police Patrolmen's Association has been demanding information on how lieutenants, including Beaudette before he became chief, and sergeants have used compensation time - which was time off given in lieu of overtime.

That practice of awarding compensation time ended last month.

The secretary of the commonwealth's supervisor of records, Alan Cote, reviewed the department's comp time records and found that some were missing and others were incomplete. On May 7, Cote sent a letter to the department scolding it for the misplaced and missing records but ordered no action.

The union also went before City Council in March to describe what it saw as rampant favoritism among a select group of police officers.

In addition, the chief chose to place Patrolman Stephen Lamberis Jr. on paid administrative leave for 17 months pending an investigation into charges that have yet to be disclosed.

City councilors have vowed to keep a dialogue on the Police Department and its abilities to investigate open through the summer. Bell, who stands by the chief, said he and Beaudette are "working on upgrading a system of collecting information that was flawed."

Beaudette attributed much of the turbulence to a lack of a contract - the 48 patrolmen have been working under an expired contract for five years - and believes the problems will subside once a new agreement is reached. The force's 13 superior officers settled a contract last month after four years of working under an expired agreement

Patrolmen are in arbitration with the city to reach a new contract.

To run the department on a stagnant budget, Beaudette has incorporated a rotating schedule of replacing cruisers by pulling requests from the capital expenditures budget, which were regularly rejected or ignored, and adding lease payments to the department's operating budget.

"There had been mechanical problems with the cruisers," he said.

Each cruiser is replaced with a new one every three years. He also brought in two four-wheel-drive trucks last year for use during the winter for a cost of \$18,000 - \$5,000 from the Police Department's \$4.53 million, or roughly 6 percent of the \$75.7 million city budget and \$12,000 from the city's general fund.

Overall, a large portion of Gloucester crime involves vandalism, alcohol - fighting or drunken driving - domestic abuse and drug distribution. Patrolmen watch the streets and highway after midnight for drunken drivers as detectives follow leads on drug sales and patrol areas where people are known to drink outside or use drugs.

"Looking at it from a community perspective, it's quality of life issues," Beaudette said.

Traffic patrols, when enough officers are on duty during a shift, monitor speeding on city streets and Route 128 and enforce stop-sign rules.

Domestic violence and fighting, by nature, are crimes that take a reactive response, Beaudette said. Basically the only way to stop fighting is to post patrolmen outside the bars.

However, if he gets staff levels up - "We hired six since I started, but we're still six down," Beaudette said - he wants to reintroduce regular foot patrols downtown.

"In December we had foot patrols on Main Street and it went beautifully," Beaudette said.

Currently, patrolmen are assigned to at least four cruisers, which cover Lanesville, West Gloucester, East Gloucester and downtown, while at least three patrolmen are assigned to man the station and the 911 lines. When more than seven patrolmen are on a shift, they can be assigned to traffic duty or be doubled up in a cruiser.

Detectives and the street sergeant, who is second in command of a shift under the watch commander, can also be out on patrols. Patrolmen or officers can park their cruisers and walk a beat if they choose, Beaudette said.

During St. Peter's Fiesta, all available officers are brought on, particularly during the 4 p.m. to midnight and the midnight to 8 a.m. shifts, to monitor the throngs of people around St. Peter's Square and Rogers, Main and Washington streets.

Police Chief John Beaudette

* 54: Age

* 1977: Joined the department

* 1995: Became sergeant

* 1998: Became lieutenant

* 2003: Became chief