

https://billingsgazette.com/news/state-and-regional/wyoming/gillette-force-gets-makeover/article_00d2f672-7a8c-5aaf-ac14-b5234f259390.html

Gillette force gets makeover

The Associated Press

Nov 9, 2006

SALE! Subscribe for \$1/mo.



Kelly Alger, right, and Evan Veiber take the police department oath after receiving his badges on Oct. 20 at Gillette City Council in Gillette, Wyo. Alger, of White Cloud, Mich., is one of three new officers from the Ferris State University law enforcement academy in Big Rapids, Mich. Associated Press

The Associated Press

GILLETTE - Kelly Alger would seem to be the new face of the Gillette Police Department.

The new recruit hails from White Cloud, Mich., and is one of three new officers from the Ferris State University law enforcement academy in Big Rapids, Mich.

Alger and the other Michigan recruits who were sworn in to the department last month have garnered nationwide attention recently from media interested how Gillette's booming economy is drawing people from bust areas around the old automobile factories.

However, the Michigan officers are just part of the change that has washed over the department in the past two years.

Police Chief Rich Adriaens is both the captain and the vanguard of that transformation. He left Royal Oak, Mich., to fill the Gillette department's top spot in January 2005 when Police Chief Ric Paul, a 30-year veteran of the force, decided to retire.

Gillette force gets makeover

SHARE THIS

Paul's retirement was the first of many to hit the department. Since Adriaens stepped in, 26 out of 73 positions have changed, he said.

The attrition rate has been highest among the department's senior officers. Adriaens has promoted 12 people since he has been in Gillette, a total that makes up 80 percent of the agency's command staff, Adriaens said.

These are challenges that can and have overcome many other local workplaces. Yet the department was fully staffed in mid-October, the first time that had happened in five years, Adriaens said.

Paul Konrad, a former officer turned recruiter, credits Adriaens' recruiting efforts for the success.

The department piggybacked off of local recruiting efforts at Michigan job fairs. When that didn't turn up as many applicants as hoped, the chief went to Michigan and personally recruited people.

Meanwhile, regular officers and recruiters such as Konrad tried every approach they could think of to attract new officers, including chatting with people during traffic stops.

"We talked to everybody," Konrad said.

Only 25 Michigan recruits applied for the jobs - a remarkable total, sure, but far from the majority. There are now just three Michigan recruits, plus the chief.

Instead, the real shift has been away from the older, longtime Campbell County residents who once made up the force.

"We're a lot younger," Adriaens said. "We're a lot more diverse (in our) backgrounds."

Cpl. Steve Wageman, whom Adriaens promoted Friday, said the competition has also gotten tougher since he joined the force. When Wageman applied for a police officer job in 1988, he was one of only three people wearing a suit out of 77 applicants. The rest wore sleeveless T-shirts, Harley-Davidson jackets and even Hawaiian shirts. In the end, the three people wearing suits got the jobs.

That doesn't happen today, he said.

Alger and his Michigan cohorts all have graduated from a law enforcement academy, meaning the department only has to send them to a two-week class on Wyoming law instead of the typical 13-week academy.

Darin Powers, who was sworn in with Alger, came from the police department in Great Falls, Mont., but started his career in Wyoming and needed no extra academy training.

The numbers alone show how competitive it has become. More than 100 people applied for the vacant police officer jobs. The department interviewed and tested 44 people. It hired just 11 new officers.

"I think a lot of the officers that are coming aboard have been looking at this (career) for a long time," Konrad said.

Adriaens is presiding over a department very different from the one he inherited. Alger is certainly one face of that transformation. But so are Powers and Wageman - and even the chief himself.

"We're changing the same way our city's been changing," Adriaens said.

Copyright © 2006 Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.

Be the first to know

Get local news delivered to your inbox!

* I understand and agree that registration on or use of this site constitutes agreement to its user agreement and [privacy policy](#).
