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Alexandria volunteers help police patrol

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From college kids to the retired, local citizens like to lend a hand

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

ALEXANDRIA - When Police Chief Mike Ward comes up short on resources, he doesn't turn to the taxpayers or overwork his officers. He relies on his team of VIPS - Volunteers in Police Service.

He has eight volunteers in his department, which will be starting a new class in June. They wear khaki pants with a golf shirt that sports a VIPS emblem.

"Some help with administration tasks in the office," said Ward. "Several are qualified to take the cruiser on citizen's patrol doing business checks and vacation checks - rattling doors after hours. They help us out by responding to accidents and work the traffic so the officers can work the accident itself."

ADVERTISEMENT The program started in July 2004. Some of the volunteers have joined law enforcement full time. Howard Trapnell was hired by Ward as a criminal investigator.

Trapnell, a former Marine from New York who retired to his wife's home of Northern Kentucky, was happy playing golf until Ward approached him. He had done investigative work with the Marines.

"He told me he was starting this new program and wanted me to be part of it. ... A year later, he came to the house and put an application in my hand," said Trapnell. "I realized I missed it and enjoyed it."

Jeff Claybern has been a volunteer since the program's inception. The 48-year-old Alexandria native said he had a calling to do police work but had too much invested in his day job at General Electric. The VIPS program gives him a way to do both.

"I do mostly patrol work," said Claybern, "If I see something out of the ordinary, I call a regular officer."

Applicants for the program must be 18, possess a Kentucky driver's license and have a good driving record, have no felony or misdemeanor convictions within the last five years, possess competent written and verbal skills, complete the VIPS academy, attend a monthly team meeting and training, perform 16 hours of



ZOOM

Alexandria Police Chief Mike Ward

volunteer duty each month and be in good physical condition.

"Before we hire them, we put them through almost the entire process we would put an applicant through that wanted to be a police officer because they have full access to the police department," Ward said. "They do a lot of things that are confidential."

Ward emphasizes the diverse background of the volunteers.

"We've got some kids in college up to retired people - insurance company employees, a retiree from AT&T, one works in manufacturing, one works for P&G - an array of different lifestyles and life experiences," said Ward.

No matter the background, each is interested in serving the community, Ward said.

"I like mostly just being able to help them out. This is a great department. How they handle everything so professional. They are a good bunch of guys to be with," said Claybern.

Applications for the VIPS program can be found on the department's Web site at www.alexandriaky.org.

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