

Weston police chief on road to recovery

Jerry Keuhn
Reporter

In his 25 years with the Weston Police Department, Chief Terry Blanton, 52, has been first on the scene of many vehicular accidents. He has also written scores of tickets for driving offenses. On March 27, while returning home to Plattsburg after working a routine shift in Weston, Blanton found himself with the situation reversed.

Blanton, who has been with the Weston Police Department since 1982 and has been the City's police chief since 1995, said he was driving his Chevrolet pickup east of Dearborn on Hwy. 116 when he nodded off and drove his truck into an oncoming farm tractor. His truck came to a rest on the driver's side, pinning him inside. Emergency responders had to cut the truck open to get Blanton out, and he was then taken by helicopter to Heartland Hospital in St. Joseph, where emergency surgery was done. Soon thereafter, he was transported to Saint Luke's Hospital in Kansas City, where he underwent three more operations in three days.

As a result of the accident, Blanton broke his left tibia in two places requiring a rod to be placed in his leg, suffered a hip injury which required his hip socket to be rebuilt, cracked his sternum and broke the ulna in his right arm, which required a plate and screws for repair.

"I had been putting in some extra hours going through the process of trying to hire more police officers for the department," Blanton said. "When it happened, I didn't really think I was tired, but the next thing I knew I hit a tractor going the other way. Just like anyone else in that situation, I received a ticket for careless driving and failure to stay on the right side of the road. I'm just glad that no one was hurt besides me."

Sergeant Kip McGrath, who has worked with Blanton on the Weston Police Department for 24 years, has handled the day-to-day operations of the Department during Blanton's absence. McGrath said while Blanton has been missed, he and the other officers have worked to make the best out of a bad situation. "When I got the call, I immediately went to the hospital and checked on him, then did what I could to help him and his wife, Mary, as much as possible," McGrath said. "An accident like that could happen to any one of us at anytime. We've gotten old working together, and when you work that close to someone for that long, they become like family.

"Things here (at the police department) have gone well since he's been gone, and if I have questions, I call him. It would be worse if he couldn't make decisions, but I have been staying in contact with him and keeping him updated on what's going on. We're working more hours, but we've got some part-timers who have been picking up the slack by working more hours."

Blanton, meanwhile, finished several weeks of in-house therapy last week, and will begin outpatient therapy at Saint Luke's Hospital in Smithville next week. He said the doctors told him he was healing nicely and is a couple of weeks ahead of schedule.

"I've come a long ways in the last 10 weeks, and still have a ways to go," Blanton said. "I'm hoping I can get back to work in the next 4-6 weeks, because it's been horrible sitting around on my derriere and using a walker to get around. I want to get back to work so I can give some of our officers some needed time off. A lot of people — not just in Weston but everywhere — have given me a lot of support and help during this time and my wife and I really appreciate that. It's part of what makes me think of Weston not just as a workplace, but as a home, even though I haven't lived there since 1995."

Weston PD has grown along with the rest of the City

Since Blanton joined the Weston Police Department in 1982, the department has grown from a police chief and one part-time officer (Blanton) to its current staff of four full-time officers and three part-timers, including two who were hired this year. Blanton said that the department has done its best to grow along with the community.

"When I first started here, downtown Weston was pretty sparse," Blanton said. "Then as the tourists started coming here and became business owners themselves, the town has taken off. It certainly has brought a lot more traffic and people here, but while we could be a larger police department, I've tried to keep the size at a minimum and our growth has been slow and steady like the City itself."

Besides Weston's growth, another challenge for the department is handling the traffic control and parking for the City's numerous festivals and special events, as well as the extra traffic along Hwy. 45 due to the construction of the Iatan II power plant and the influx of workers to build and man the plant.

"Being a tourism town, we have to look for volunteers to help us with Applefest and the other festivals," McGrath said. "It does throw a wrinkle into things, especially when we don't know how many people are coming. We have to make sure we have the training and resources available in case something happens, although we've been lucky for the most part."

Blanton said City support and a tenure program has allowed the police department to provide 24-hour coverage, to prosper and grow, and to keep quality officers without turnover. Along with Blanton and McGrath, most of the other officers have served Weston for many years.

"Tenure is as good as gold in a small town police department," Blanton said. "Being able to keep good officers is a real key to keeping things running smoothly. We've been fortunate in that we don't have a lot of turnover with officers coming here for a little while to get some experience and then moving on. I think Weston is a great town with a great atmosphere, and though I've had many opportunities to leave, I haven't done it because I have a special place in my heart for Weston."

Cities across County to adopt soldiers, families left behind

Lee Stubbs
Editor

Hundreds of thousands of enlisted men and women are serving in the United States military around the world. Support from Americans at home is wanted, appreciated and makes the time away from loved ones more tolerable.

But what about those loved ones left behind? They also need support and in some cases, assistance in caring for their families while their husbands, wives, brothers and sisters serve abroad.

Enter the Platte County Mayors Council, whose Adopt-A-Soldier program aims to support not only those serving, but their families as well.

"We talked with many soldiers and their main concern is if their families are OK back home," Platte City Mayor Dave Brooks said. "If they don't have to worry about their families, they can focus and perform their jobs better."

Brooks and the other six mayors on the Council — Parkville's Kathy Dusenberry, Lake Waukomis's Tom Rezentes, Platte Woods's John Smedley, Riverside's Kathleen Rose, Weatherby Lake's Alan York and Tracy's Brenda Ferguson — are confident citizens in their cities will become involved in the program.

"We've already had responses from private citizens and some businesses," Brooks said.

Dusenberry said the program transcends politics.

"Whether we believe in the (Iraq) war or not, we have to support the troops and their families," she said.

Brooks said initially, the cities will adopt about 500 soldiers in the 1st Sustainment Brigade stationed at Fort Riley, Kan., who will be deployed to Iraq this summer. Each city will adopt a different division of the brigade and match volunteer families with military families. The program has drawn a great response from the soldiers and military officials at Fort Riley.

"The program established by the Mayors of Platte County with the 1st Sustainment Brigade has started quite the buzz in our area," Fort Riley media relations officer Cpt. Nicole Harrell said. "Our families and soldiers are excited about this new relationship. The support has not only boosted the morale of the soldiers deployed and preparing for deployment but it has also given the families an added sense of belonging."

Assistance and support will include writing letters to those serving overseas and sending them military-approved items. It will also include providing support and material assistance for the enlisted's families at home, especially women who are either pregnant or who have small children.

Brooks said when the Mayors' Council met with military personnel families during a recent trip to Fort Riley to learn more about their needs, the mayors were moved by the warm reception they got, as well as the real need they saw for assistance.

"One of the women spoke up and said there is a need for diapers and baby food," he said. "I got emotional when I heard that and so did the other mayors. We can help with these needs and we should be helping."

That led to the kickoff of the program — a diaper drive. Beginning Monday, citizens can drop off any size diapers at three locations in Platte County — City Hall in Platte City, Platte County Community Center South in Parkville and the Riverside Community Center.

“We all realize families are left behind during war-times, but when you see it up close it hits home,” Dusenberry said. “We’re hoping to haul a truckload of diapers to Fort Riley at the end of the month.”

The Mayors Council took on the project about seven months ago when members of a Platte City-area soldiers support effort approached them. Rezendes, who is ex-military and a civilian employee at Fort Leavenworth, was directed to Fort Riley, where he contacted Lt. Col. Robert Brem, battalion commander for the 1st Sustainment Brigade. Eventually, the Council visited Fort Riley and talked with soldiers and their families. The Council will also attend a June 13 pre-deployment picnic at Fort Riley, where the mayors will visit with soldiers and their families, deliver supplies, take part in activities and spend more time ascertaining the soldiers’ needs.

Harrell said the Mayors Council is a unique troop support effort.

“There are programs in place for family members on our military installation, but for an entire county to take the initiative to seek out soldiers to sponsor speaks volumes of the care and love they have for our service members and their families,” she said. “This whole experience is humbling and reinforces the realization of what an American soldier means to so many.

“While they are constantly thanking us for our service, I must extend the same thanks to Platte County for their motivation to serve those in service.”

Volunteers may get involved by contacting any one of the afore-mentioned mayors or their staff at their respective city halls. Brooks said material goods may be donated or cash contributions can be made. Checks should be made out to 1st Sustainment Brigade.

“This is a great group of mayors and we really have our hearts in this effort,” Dusenberry said. “I’m involved because I remember about 5-6 years ago, we had some Vietnam veterans involved in the Parkville July 4 celebration. Some of those vets said it was the first time they really felt welcomed back home.

“We need to take care of the people who are protecting us.”

MoDOT to close Highway 92

Citizen Staff Report

The Missouri Department of Transportation has announced that travel between Platte City and Smithville will be disrupted for the remainder of the summer.

Highway 92 will be closed for the replacement of the Todd Creek bridge just east of Highway B, between Platte City and Smithville, beginning June 11. The nearly half-mile project will close the bridge and a portion of 92 to through traffic during construction, which will be completed in late September. The new, 190-foot bridge will be constructed in the same location and raised to prevent frequent flooding.

The project includes an incentive/disincentive program where the contractor will be rewarded for completing the project ahead of schedule and penalized for work beyond the contracted timeframe.

Alternate routes will be marked for the duration of the closure. Built in 1932, the existing bridge is 150 feet long and carries approximately 4,000 vehicles a day.

Public Hearing for Highway D

Residents in the area of Highway D in Platte County south of Platte City have until June 21 to request a public design hearing on bridge work requiring the closure of three miles of the road for approximately four weeks this fall.

The project consists of pavement repair, surface treatment, pavement marking and bridge deck surface work along with expansion joint replacement on a bridge over Interstate 435 west of Ferrelview. The road will be closed in one direction at a time and traffic will be detoured during the proposed bridge work. The detour routes will vary depending on the direction of travel, and will reroute traffic an average of three miles.

All requests for the public hearing must be received in writing by June 21, and may be sent to Greg Anderson, project manager, Missouri Department of Transportation, 602 North Belt Highway, St. Joseph, MO 64502.