

RECRUITING AND TRAINING POLICE OFFICERS IN ALTOONA

PRESENTED BY

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ONCE UPON A TIME IN ALTOONA...

- In the 1970's, candidates competing to be police officers in Altoona greatly exceeded 100 during every civil service testing cycle
- The police force included more than 100 sworn officers
- In the early 2000's, the number of applicants decreased to less than 85 per testing cycle
- The police force in 2005 had decreased to approximately 72 sworn
- Historically, the City's testing cycle for police officers was bi-annually
- The testing cycle for firefighters was also biannually, occurring in the off-year

MORE RECENTLY IN ALTOONA...

- The State eliminated reimbursements for candidates sent to the academy
- The City then accepted only candidates who were Act 120 certified
- The list of eligible candidates on the final list shrunk to as few as 8
- State began partial reimbursement for the academy (75% Tuition / 45% Salary)
- City rescinded the Act 120 requirement for candidates

CURRENTLY IN ALTOONA...

- Candidates for the exam increased, but not where near historic levels
- Well trained police officers leaving service for other positions
- Smaller pool of candidates combined with higher attrition
- Bi-annual examination process accelerated to semi-annual
- Difficult to backfill vacancies
- Current recruitment provided 37 candidates for the examination process

THE RECRUITMENT TRAINING CONNECTION

- Academy plus Field Training Program = more than 9-months
- Candidates move from raw recruits to on-street operations
- On-street experience results in capable police officers
- Capable police officers often recruited by PA and other entities
- Experienced officers leave service and the cycle begins again

PRE AND POST ACADEMY TRAINING WHILE ON PROBATION

- Orientation and Department Specific Training (1-2 weeks)
 - Policy and Procedure / Policy Testing / Firearms / DT / Less Lethal / Active Shooter Training
- Field Training Program (minimum 14 weeks)
- Post FTO specialized Training
 - De-Escalation / Addiction and Overdose Recognition / Various Patrol, Investigations, and Accident specific trainings

FIELD TRAINING PROGRAM

- Modified San Jose Model
 - Step 1-3 (Minimum of 4 weeks each) each with a different FTO
 - Each step has different grading standards and task sheets
 - Step 4 (Minimum of 2 weeks) with original FTO
 - “Shadow step”
 - Step 5 (Minimum of 12 weeks)
 - Officers are now on solo patrol, but still have additional paperwork and responsibilities
 - Checkout rides

INGREDIENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL FTO PROGRAM

- Support from the Administration (Resources and OT)
- The right people involved
 - Program coordinator
 - Must share the Department's vision and priorities.
 - Must have the time to dedicate to the program
 - Field Training Officers
 - Also must believe in the mission
 - Receive additional training in ways to cultivate adult learning
- Constantly reevaluating and modifying the program to meet today's needs.

IMPORTANCE FOR NOT TAKING SHORTCUTS

- Organizational culture
 - This process, and those involved, is one of the greatest ways to influence the organizational culture into what it should be.
- Obligation to the community and the Officers to provide employees with all the necessary tools to do the job right.
 - Important to note that as the expectations of Officers increase, so does the length of time they will be “off the street”.
- Establishes standards and provides the documentation needed to terminate those employees that will become problems down the road.

MOVING FORWARD (WE CAN ALWAYS IMPROVE)

- Develop on-ed training for the Field Training Officers
 - Currently FTOs receive initial specialized training but there is no formal process for them to receive updated training in mentorship / teaching principles.
- Increase scenario and virtual reality training
 - This would be in addition to what occurs during the normal Step 1-3 process.
- Utilize Body Worn Camera video review and feedback more often
 - Already done, but usually only to address specific calls or issues. Having a more frequent and in depth process could have training value.

IN CONCLUSION

- Increased issues with recruiting and retention could easily influence an organization to cut corners in the training program - We must fight this urge!
- Instead we may need to rethink the staffing levels we budget for in order to account for the delay between hiring and when an Officer is ready for “solo patrol”.
- Recruiting and retaining police officers in Altoona, like almost every other locality, has changed over the years – It’s much more difficult now!
- Training police officers has become a much more complex and involved undertaking
- In Altoona, recruiting police officers and training police officers is an interconnected process

QUESTIONS?

