

2004 Amherst Police Report

The Amherst Police Department had a very productive year in 2004. For the first time in many years the Department operated with a full staff of personnel, which facilitated many positive improvements in the service the Department provided to the community. Providing quality service to the citizens is a focal point in the mission of the Amherst Police Department. Beyond delivering superior service, it is also vital that the Department be vigilant for new programs to meet the needs of the community, as well as ensuring that existing programs continue to be productive in meeting those needs.

The year 2004 saw the Department add two new programs in an effort to be more proactive. The first addition was a Police Bicycle Patrol program. The Department was able to create a new program utilizing existing funds, as well as donations, to address several problematic areas in town. The program utilized the Middle School Resource Officer during summer vacation, as well as a part-time officer, to aggressively patrol specific areas of town that presented challenges to standard patrol practices. The program had a good first year, and further development, as well as refinement, will make it an effective, efficient addition to the Department. The second new program was the addition of a School Resource Officer (SRO) at Souhegan High. An additional position was created at the request of the Souhegan School District to place a full-time SRO at the school. This *out of the budget cycle* request was made by the school to assist in addressing a large, underserved portion of our population. Approved by the Board of Selectmen with the understanding that it would be funded by the Souhegan School District for the 2004 school year, this position was filled in September 2004 by an existing Amherst officer, and the program is off to a great start. The Department has a United States Department of Justice – Office of COPS grant pending to fund a significant portion of this position for three years. Pending a decision on the grant, the Board of Selectmen and the School Board, in a collaborative effort, have agreed to share the costs of the position in the next budget.

As 2004 came to a close, the Department was able to fill its last vacancy, an additional investigator position that had been budgeted to commence in September. A new officer will complete the police academy in early spring of 2005, allowing the department to assign an officer to focus on follow-up and specialized investigations. In addition, the Department was able to return to our organizational structure by promoting two officers within the patrol division. In April, Officer James Brace was promoted to Sergeant, and is now a patrol supervisor. In December, Sergeant Mark Reams was promoted to Lieutenant, and is now in charge of the Operations component of the Department.

In viewing statistics for 2004, the Department saw many favorable improvements. The number of miles the officers patrolled town roads was up significantly, reflecting the return to normal staffing levels. This statistic is critical in that patrol visibility is the backbone of our traffic safety and crime reduction programs. In regard to traffic safety, the Department made a commitment to address the increasing number of motor vehicle crashes, as well as the large number of citizen complaints concerning inappropriate driving. This led to a 35% increase in motor vehicle contacts. The end result was a 7% reduction in the number of crashes, with the number of personal injury crashes being at a five year low. In addition, citizen complaints in this area dropped by 10%. Although the number of arrests made by the Department increased dramatically, rising by 51%, the total number of crimes remained static, with only thefts and assaults showing significant increases. Much of the increase in theft reports can be attributed to the expanding activity in the commercial areas of town. In regard to the assaults, the great majority of the reports involve individuals known to each other, frequently in domestic situations. Those types of incidents are not usually affected or reduced by a visible patrol presence.

During the fourth quarter of 2004, the Department began implementing two major systems which will dramatically alter and improve the way service is provided to the town. The Amherst Public Safety Communications Center, which began operation at the end of the year, will provide emergency communications services to the town. The Center will address many of the interoperability issues our emergency services previously faced, as well as provide a higher level of service to the community. In conjunction with the new center, the Department is updating their records management software to a more powerful system that provides greater resources to the personnel. The amount of information readily available to dispatchers

and officers will increase efficiency, as well as officer safety. As with any major change, these improvements have taken a great deal of hard work and patience from **all** employees, which has led to the early success of both these monumental projects.

The Department continues to review existing programs, research new ones, as well as explore options involving regionalizing some specialized functions. As the town grows and the world changes, it becomes even more important to heed our mission statement by “*maintain(ing) a vision for the future which is steeped in a tradition of excellence*”. The goal of delivering this level of excellence must be done in the most frugal manner, so as to have the least impact possible on the tax rate. The balancing act of maintaining the quality of life within the Town of Amherst at a reasonable cost will continue to be a major challenge.

The Department truly seeks to be an integral, responsive component of the community that helps guide what Amherst will be. One of our goals is to always have a clear understanding of what the community needs and wants. You can help us meet that goal by offering your input to any of our employees, or by mail, email, or telephone. In addition, we remind you to take ownership in the type of community Amherst is by reporting any suspicious or unsafe activity you may witness. The success we have in maintaining the quality of life in Amherst is directly related to your involvement.

In closing, we would like to thank the other town departments, boards, and employees for their assistance over the year. The sense of teamwork within the town contributes greatly to the high level of service provided to the citizens. In addition, the Department expresses its appreciation for all the support, shown in so many ways, provided by the townspeople. We look forward to, once again, earning your trust and respect in the coming year.