

New officer joins Roberts Police Department

news@newrichmond-news.com

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JJ Haefner began patrolling the streets of Roberts on Monday as its new full-time COPS officer.

The 30-year-old New Richmond resident completed his criminal justice studies at Chippewa Valley Tech in May and says he is glad to be working in a small community.

"I wanted to start my career in a small town and Roberts is a nice community," he said.

Prior to joining the Roberts Police Department, Haefner worked as a security guard in Bloomington, Minn. He also works as a part-time police officer with the Village of Somerset and Elmwood, positions he says he will continue to serve in.

Haefner beat out 35 other candidates for the position. The COPS position is partially funded through a special grant and will pay a portion of Haefner's salary until Jan., 2005, at which time the Village of Roberts will be responsible for the entire salary.

Police Chief Ricci Prein said he expects Haefner to do well in his new position.

"He really stood out among the other candidates and I think he will do well because he isn't afraid to stay late or volunteer when he is needed," Prein said.

Haefner has lived in New Richmond for the past year with his wife. The couple has a four-month-old daughter named Reese.

New hiring policy aims to ensure qualified candidates

The 36 candidates for the police officer's position were met with a more lengthy and much stricter application process, put in place late last year in Roberts.

"The hiring of our last officer has shown us how times have changed and we really need to put a policy in place to ensure we get the best candidate for the job," Prein said.

The former COPS officer was terminated in November after two months with the department following an in-depth report to the village from police chief Ricci Prein.

The report included indications that Davin Miller was not a Wisconsin Board certified police officer, which in turn, means that he did not meet the job requirements for the full-time COPS position. Miller was hired in September, but was placed on leave two weeks later when questions arose about his qualifications.

Miller also resigned from the Stillwater Police Department in 2000 amid an allegation and later a criminal charge that he misappropriated funds from a local Boy Scout affiliated Explorer Post, which he oversaw during his employment.

The new hiring policy created by Prein requires successful candidates to undergo two criminal and background checks and appear before a special committee made up of officers from surrounding police departments. Finalists for the position must also appear before the Roberts Public Safety Committee, who makes the final decision for the department.

"We don't want another situation like we had and I think that having a panel of law enforcement officers at the initial interview is an excellent way to begin the selection process," Prein said. "Even before candidates have the first interview, we are doing an initial background check. Then the final five candidates undergo a more complete background and criminal check."

"With this new policy, we are getting the absolute best candidate for the job," Prein explained.