

# Changes in the crosshairs for city police department

By Debbie Lowe  
Staff writer

The residents and businesses of Delphi will have a new police chief serving them beginning Jan. 1. Change was promised in the city election and according to new chief Justin Darling, change is what is on the drawing table.

"I am considering several options to make the police department accountable to the community and to involve community members," Darling said. "I have three priorities that I will be focusing on," he said. "They are community involvement, school involvement, and officer training and education."

Darling said he will pursue a community policing model which involves officers walking a beat and interacting with residents and business owners on a regular basis. Prevention and detection are goals Darling said his department will strive to achieve during his administration.

Physical fitness standards for police officers will be implemented and Darling said walking the streets should benefit officers who want to maintain good health.

"I plan to do a lot of that myself," he said.

Darling said he wants to have a "non-threatening presence" in the schools and to work with administrators. To that end, Darling met with Delphi Community School Corporation administration to initiate discussions about protocol and procedures. He said he would like to be involved in the law enforcement class offered at the high school.

Darling said state-mandated officer training will be enforced and documented when officers complete those requirements. Additionally, he said he wants officers to receive specialized training of interest. He said additional training will build officer moral and will offer the community a greater variety of resources. Darling expressed the need for officers to be able to speak Spanish to be able to interact and reach out to that growing population.

Darling said Delphi officers will have a greater presence in town with more visibility to deter crime.

"That goes back to training," he explained.

He said he will implement 12-hour shifts which will include night-time business checks.

"We will develop uniform

business contact information to be able to check out unusual activity if it is noted during business checks," he said. "I want officers involved in the community. They will leave cards with businesses when they do an after-hours check."

Darling plans to be involved with the Delphi Chamber of Commerce and hold meetings with business owners and residents to discuss crime prevention activities.

"The community must take an active role to make Delphi safer," he explained.

Darling is a Knightstown native. He and wife, Melissa, came to live in Carroll County in 1995. They have three children and are hoping to adopt number four.



Darling

Darling, who comes from a family of law enforcement officers, graduated from Ball State University in 1994, Indiana University in 2007 and plans to pursue a masters' degree from IU Kokomo in 2008, if possible.

He achieved the rank of corporal with the Indiana State Police, working from 1994 to 1999, and was a K-9 deputy and SWAT team leader for the Carroll County Sheriff's Department from 1999 to 2004. He began working in the county Emergency Management Agency part-time in 2003 and began full-time employment after leaving the sheriff's department. He continues to provide part-time police protection in Flora and has been a firefighter

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of works," Strasser said. "But the council will receive more explanation about those decisions. That's important to me. Everybody has to be coming along at the same rate."

"I want the public to be fully informed and have access to information," he said. "But I don't want them to be overwhelmed with paperwork."

One way Strasser plans to enhance information sharing is to explore greater utilization of the city Web site. He said he would like to see the city council agenda, meeting minutes and the minutes of all boards and committees posted for the public to be able to access readily.

Strasser said he continues to meet with all the city groups necessary to evaluate city participation, such as Main Street, Delphi Chamber of Commerce and the Forestry Commission. He said the grant coordinator position is a vital position to the city with high expectations and high visibility.

"After evaluating and reviewing the needs of the city, the mission and focus of that valuable position will be defined," he said.

Local attorney Kurtis Fouts will represent the city and provide legal assistance when needed. Strasser said Fouts has already helped him understand the Indiana Code and how that can impact local government. For instance, he now understands that all committee and board appointments are to be made from residents of the city.

"This may change the make-up of some boards, he said. "We will adhere strictly to the Indiana

Code."

Strasser said he realizes what happens in county government can impact city issues directly and plans to establish a good working relationship with both the county commissioners and county council members.

One issue Strasser recognized as important to address was economic development. Strasser said he would work closely with the firm hired to develop a comprehensive land use plan for the city that will be integrated into the county model. Strasser noted the need for business and economic growth in Delphi. He said there is a need to consider the impact of the Hoosier Heartland Corridor, historic resources and the Canal Association and trails system when planning for city economic development.

He also said the city could choose to appoint an economic development board. He said in the past a separate board served the city but it has not been active in several years.

"There have been some residents who expressed interest in re-activating that," he said. Strasser said he would be contacting the county EDC for "direction and clarity" for the city.

Strasser described any changes to city government would be "evolutionary" in nature. He said it will be imperative to understand departmental needs. He will host weekly department head meetings to discuss issues which will ensure those in charge are in line with expectations.

since he was 14 years old.

Darling said he understands that he is coming from a job that is obscure from the public eye to one that is ultra-visible to scrutiny.

"I feel good about that," he said. "To me, integrity is number one. This is a public service job."

"I want to have a huge presence in a positive way," he concluded. "I've always been open and I will continue that. I'm as transparent as can be."

The new chief said he will be in his office during normal weekly working hours, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. He plans to work some football and basketball games to maintain a presence. Darling said he plans to have a regular "chief's night in" to be as accessible to the public as possible.

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