

# THE BLUE LIGHT Bulletin

Official  
Publication  
of the  
Gastonia Police  
Department

Terry L. Sult, Chief of Police

Vol. XI, Issue I, Summer 2007

## Inside

### Chief's Message

Page 2

### Are We Ready For Vehicle Bombs?

Page 3

### Learning & Sharing New Ideas at PERF

Page 4

### Eric Howard & 30 Others Recipients of GPD Awards

Page 5

### How Important Is Faithfulness?

Page 6

### Celeste Lail Celebrates Retirement

Page 6

### Capt. Robert Helton Receives State Award

Page 7

## Gastonia's New City Manager



Mr. Palenick

By Donna Lahser  
BLB Editor

Gastonia has a new City Manager: James Palenick who has more than 20 years of experience as a City Manager with his most recent service with Rio Rancho, NM (pop. 76,000).

Mr. Palenick holds a master's degree in public administration from Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Mich. He replaces Ed Munn who retired in December with 31 years of service with the City with the last three as City Manager.

"I am both honored and humbled by my selection to serve as Gastonia's new City Manager," Mr. Palenick said in an

email. "The opportunity to serve a community as vibrant, cohesive, multi-dimensional, and committed to a shared vision of a sustainable future is a challenge I am embracing with great enthusiasm. Both my family and I look forward to making Gastonia our home, and I personally am eager to immerse myself fully in the ongoing efforts to enhance the quality of life for all Gastonia residents."

Gastonia City Council contracted with the Mercer Group, Inc., out of Atlanta earlier this year to help with the search for a new City Manager and more than 60 people applied for the job. Mr. Palenick was selected out of a final group of three candidates following interviews with City Council on June 5.

Mr. Palenick begins work Aug. 1-6.

## Rally Against Guns, Gangs and Drugs

A community rally against guns, gangs and drugs was held June 20 at the Erwin Center. The event offered family entertainment including music from Power 98 and Christian rapper D-Block. Chief Terry Sult talked about the need for community partnerships like those formed to host the rally. Time Warner Cable's Susan Breckenridge spoke about TWC's commitment to Gastonia's Project Safe Neighborhood efforts and unveiled a public service announcement that was applauded by the crowd.



# Message From The Chief

## Multi-Agency Teams Announced

**T**errorism is a challenge all public safety agencies face in the Twenty-first Century and steps must be taken to adapt to modern times.

We took a big step forward on June 28th when Gaston County Sheriff Alan Cloninger, Mount Holly Chief David Belk, Belmont Chief David James, and I made a joint public announcement about the integration of Special Situation Teams, starting with a multi-agency SWAT Team.

However, it is not enough the chiefs agree to such a major operational change. The most important decision makers in the process are the team members themselves. Without their support such an effort would ultimately fail. Seeing first hand the enthusiastic acceptance of this proposal by the team demonstrating their understanding of significant potential toward regional preparedness was amazing! In 30 plus years of policing I have never had greater pride in an organization or the

people in the organization.

Originally the Gastonia Police SWAT Team included an 11-man entry team along with a 7-man sniper team, all from the GPD. The new multi-agency team immediately expanded to an 18-officer entry team and a 10-officer sniper team. Ultimately the SWAT Team will expand later this year to include four full entry teams and sniper teams. Agreements have already been reached to expand the concept to all Special Situations Teams (SWAT, Technical Support, Hostage Negotiators, Bomb Squad and Dive Team).

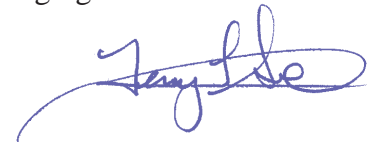
Additionally, the GPD maintains Shift Tactical Officers who are specially trained and carry enhanced weapons serving as an immediate reaction force to rapidly evolving incidents such as school attacks. Partnering agencies have agreed to incorporate the Shift Tactical Officer Program through co-training. Finally, an integrated Civil Emergency Unit (CEU) will be developed to combat incidents of civil unrest, riot or emergency

deployment situations.

Cities and counties throughout the Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord Metropolitan Statistical Area have long entered into a Mutual Aid Agreement by which police agencies support each other as needed and/or requested. This new multi-agency approach will build on this history.

Advantages include sharing costs, manpower and resources thereby reducing the individual cost to all member agencies; decreasing duplication of resources and equipment; increasing sustainability over an extended period during incidents; increasing the ability to provide a regional response to any agency requesting assistance; increasing grant funding opportunities because of regional participation; access to Urban Area Security Initiative Resources; and increasing the ability to maintain a routine operations deployment capacity while providing additional training opportunities because of increased manpower.

After the initial phase of SWAT Team integration, other agencies within Gaston County will be encouraged to join in this effort to increase efficiency and effectiveness in our rapidly changing world.



Terry L. Sult  
Chief of Police

## Paint Your Face Happy

**GPD's Family Fun Day May 18 was loads of fun with BBQ, Tony's ice cream, face painting, music, police and fire department vehicles, a snake from the Schiele Museum and the many fine GPD families.**



# Are We Ready For Vehicle Bombs?

By **Sgt. Ed Turas**

BLB Writer

Considering the rash of violence around guns, it's hard to keep in perspective

the threat we as

Americans face from bombs. In Iraq alone, approximately 23,000 devices are found a month, from small booby traps to vehicles big enough to drop a building or throw a tank. Bombs pack a powerful punch for little money and effort.

With the freedom of

movement and access to information all Americans share and take for granted, Bomb Squad members often discuss when our time to experience these events will come and will we be prepared?

Helping 24 Bomb Technicians from North Carolina and Tennessee be prepared was the reason instructors came to Gastonia June 5-7 for a Large Vehicle Bomb Countermeasures school. All Bomb Technicians attend the United States Army Ordnance Munitions and Electronics Maintenance School at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Ala. The school in Gastonia was one of four in the country this year to update skills. The school was funded by the FBI with four instructors from Redstone Arsenal as well as a dozen Federal Agents from across the country.

The course was vital in preparing for one of the worst challenges facing public safety agencies today, the Vehicle Bomb Improvised Explosive Device or VBIED. Widely used throughout



**A car fire during the Large Vehicle Bomb Countermeasures class.**

the rest of the world, VBIEDs pose a dilemma as difficult to combat as the lone suicide bomber. Passenger cars can easily carry 500 pounds of explosive to tractor-trailers, which can well exceed 40,000 pounds. VBIEDs are probably one of the most likely threats we'll face in the near future on a regular basis because of ease of mobility and its mass devastation.

Instructors teaching the course focused on countermeasures and remote entry techniques to keep Bomb Technicians, or Explosive Ordnance Disposal units (EOD) as safe as possible while attempting to Render Safe or "dispose" of just such a threat. Various types of vehicles from cars, a van, to a UPS delivery truck with simulated devices were scattered about the Gastonia Police Firearms and Tactical Training Center. Sixteen countermeasures or IED defeat and

disposal devices were deployed, pounding and punching through vehicles to defeat the IEDs. Bomb Technicians use explosives in controlled amounts and in unique configurations to beat the bomb

maker's deadly devices. The largest countermeasure used was at the end of the day on a UPS truck and consisted of 17 pounds of TNT equivalent. That may sound like a lot, except when you consider it's better than the

5,000 pounds going off that was in the truck! Such a vehicle and amount of explosive was what Timothy McVeigh set off at the Murrah building in Oklahoma in 1995, and it wasn't even a complete explosion!

## The Blue Light Bulletin Staff

**Executive Editor**  
Chief Terry Sult

**Editor**  
Donna C. Lahser

### Staff Writers/Contributors

Gordon Cobb, Steve Norris,  
Mike Lari, E.G. Starling,  
Sherry Dunaway, Tony Wilson,  
David Morton, Chuck Lifford,  
Teri Mullinax, Phil Firrantello,  
Jonas Hansen, Robert Helton,  
Jimmy Swanger, Patrick Daley,  
Mike Schwartz, Warner Doles

# Learning & Sharing Ideas At PERF

## Dialogue and Studies Focus on International Best Practices

By Capt. Chuck Lifford  
BLB Writer

If I were to sum up my experience in one sentence it would be, “You don’t know what you don’t know, until you learn that you didn’t know it.” Learning new concepts and ideas everyday has been the norm since March 5, when I began working with the Management Services Unit of the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF).

The Management Services Division provides technical assistance and conducts studies for law enforcement agencies – large and small – examining operational challenges faced by those organizations. It has been a challenging experience, and I’m enjoying it.

One concern I had prior to joining the PERF team, was my authority to provide advice to larger organizations. However, I quickly learned that “best practices” utilized in Gastonia are just as relevant for other departments regardless of size. Issues we grapple with – such as violent crime, gangs, recruiting, staffing, compensation, or community accountability – are the same concerns faced by everyone. However, there have been some unusual moments.

One Friday, PERF received a



**A patch for the Ukraine state police shows a cobra ready to strike as opposed to friendlier, more desirable community policing concepts and images.**

visit from a delegation of officials from the Ukraine state police. They were interested in learning strategies for developing and improving relationships between their citizens and the police. As a part of the former Soviet Union, there is not much trust. Through an interpreter, I along with the other police officers working at PERF, tried to explain what community policing entailed. Afterwards, they gave me one of the patches from their Highway Enforcement Unit. Their insignia is a Cobra, coiled, with fangs exposed, and prepared to strike. That provided some insight into some of their problems in establishing relationships.

Another project was developing a research design to study the Smith College (MA) Department of Public Safety. As a Women’s College and part of the Ivy League, they have a long,

distinguished history. Their public safety force has never carried firearms. In the wake of the Virginia Tech shooting, they wondered if this policy should be re-examined. They requested a concept report explaining what PERF would assess if contracted.

I received the assignment and approached the project using the same model used in community projects – the POP triangle. I proposed we would assess the players (officers’ skills and abilities), the handlers (supervisors, policies, and procedures), and the environment (budget constraints, response by the community). We would review the impact of the change from a cost/benefit perspective, the impact on the officers’ duties, and shifts in the Smith College culture. Hopefully they will accept the proposal.

There are several studies on the horizon. Upcoming projects include a manpower assessment in Ft. Collins, CO, a violent crime study in Brooklyn Park, MN, and a long-term project for the City and County of San Francisco, CA. Each has an individual problem unique to the agency but, overall, the topics of study are relevant to everyone.

The fellowship concludes on Aug. 31, and I am looking forward to my return to the GPD. It has been very affirming to review other agencies and be able to recognize that our department is not far away from being one of the very best. I am thankful to have the opportunity to participate in helping our department achieve its long range goals to create a safer community.

# GPD Awards To Eric Howard, 30 Others

By Donna Lahser  
BLB Editor

**E**ric Howard has been awarded a Lifesaving Medal as part of Gastonia's Police Department's 2007 Annual Awards program.



**Officer Howard**

The medal was awarded for his actions during a Jan. 13 collision and reported hit and run in which the suspect fled on foot. Officer Howard spotted the suspect and, after a brief foot chase, caught the offender who resisted arrest in the travel lane of Bessemer City Road. Officer Howard placed the suspect on the ground and was struggling with him to get him handcuffed when he saw a motor vehicle traveling toward them.

"Officer Howard stayed calm, grabbed the offender by his shirt and removed him from the lane of

travel to safety," Sgt. Doc Morton said in the award nomination statement. "He then was able to roll out of the travel lane, barely escaping from being run over. Officer Howard stayed calm in the face of danger and placed the safety of the offender first over the safety of himself."

A GPD Citizen's Award has been presented to Chris Watts, a student with Highland School of Technology. Chris created the department's first Sniper Conference video which can be viewed online at [gastoniasniper.org](http://gastoniasniper.org).

Other awards include:

**Exceptional Duty:** Doc Morton for the Lt. Col. Dave Grossman seminars.

**Educational Awards:** Heath McMullan for the Advanced Law Enforcement Certificate, Mike Lewis for a bachelor's degree, and Scott Norton for bachelor's and



**Highland School of Technology's Chris Watts is the recipient of a Citizen's Award.**

master's degrees.

### **Commendation Certificate:**

Phillip Smith for catching a breaking and entering suspect at Gastonia Sheet Metal who confessed to a lot of scrap metal crimes.

### **Chief's Achievement:**

- Patrick Daley and Rick Caldwell for creation of the Citizen's Police Academy;
- Chuck Lifford for creation of GPD's first strategic plan;
- Gary Johnson for development of a Training records system.
- The Recruitment Team for recruiting success: Dayna Hanna, Nikki Armstrong, Jamey Blalock, Eric Brice, Nancy Capistran, Mike Chambers, Trent Conard, Jon Hallman, Albert Fleming, Heather Houser, Ricky Lovingood, Heath McMullan, Jackie Snyder, and Jeremy Williams.
- The Pay and Evaluation Committee for success: Caron George, Tim Adams, Vic Yager, Steve Colvard, Gene Weaver, David Prince, Jeff Wooten, David Brogdon, Steve Duncan, Stacy Conley, and Julie Dellinger.



## Gastonia Sniper Conference Winners

**The Brunswick County Sheriff's Office Sniper Team won the 2007 Gastonia Sniper Conference. Rock Hill came in second; Gaston County Police, third; Raleigh PD, fourth; and Gaston County Sheriff's Office was fifth. (Photo by Ray Barnwell, York County Sheriff's Office)**

# Counselor's Insight

## SEMPER FI

By Chaplain Warner Doles

BLB Columnist

The marines have a motto that they take seriously, SEMPER FIDELIS, meaning, "Always Faithful." Faithfulness is extremely important to them. They express it toward each other, to their country and to the Corps.

In the heart of this motto is the commitment that they will never leave one of theirs behind. If a marine is missing in action they will do everything in their power to find him. If a marine is killed in combat, they will bring his body back, never to be left on the field of battle.

Faithfulness is the conviction

that one will do everything in his or her power to achieve or complete a task to which they have been given. What a wonderful thing to be said of a fellow officer, "he or she is always faithful." To be faithful says a lot about a person's character. It is one of the highest compliments a person can receive.

But what about being faithful to oneself? Is that important? If you know what you need to do to remain healthy physically, mentally, and spiritually, faithfulness would dictate that you do it, not only for yourselves but also for others who may depend on you! Many of you take good care of your physical needs, but that is not all you need to do. Your

emotional health is equally important. Who do you know who will listen to your concerns? To where or to whom do you go to express your feelings? Is there someone you know who can be trusted? To deny that you have feelings is self-deceit. Being faithful to your own emotional needs is as important as being faithful to your job! You cannot do the latter without the former.

You know where I stand on the spiritual aspect. Do not, under any circumstances, ignore this important area of your lives. Austin Rammell and I are always ready to hear the issues you struggle with and to offer biblical opinions we believe will help. SEMPER FI to all of you!

## GPD Tidbits

### Celeste Lail Celebrates Retirement

Celeste Lail retired from GPD with 30 years of service June 1. At a retirement party held in the Community Room photos were displayed of Celeste through the



**Interim Co-City Manager Larry Wood presents Celeste Lail with her retirement certificate.**

years with her immediate and GPD families. Many shared stories about gleeful times working with her or fun times at lunch. Celeste

has been battling cancer since 2005 and thanked everyone for their support.

\*\*\*Capt.

Robert Helton has completed the Criminal Investigator's Certificate

Program (CICP), which involved 55 days of training in investigative classes at the North Carolina Justice Academy and taking

classes online. Required core courses were: Interview and Interrogation, Case Preparation, Fundamentals of the Investigative Process, and Ethics for Investigators.

\*\*\*Officer Steve Moore has been transferred to the Central District as an Environmental Control Officer replacing Officer Danny Hubbard who retired April 1. Other new assignments are as follows: Det. Jeff Hawkins to the

(Please see **GPD Tidbits** next page)

# Capt. Rob Helton Receives State Award

By Donna Lahser  
BLB Editor

**G**astonia Police Department's Capt. Robert Helton is the 2007 recipient of the Leonard T. Williams Award, a state Juvenile Officer of the Year Award bestowed annually by the North Carolina Juvenile Officers Association (NCJOA). The award was presented to Capt. Helton by his father, Robert Helton, Sr., during an award ceremony June 21 in Atlantic Beach.

Capt. Helton has been a police officer with the Gastonia Police Department for over 20 years, with



**Capt. Helton's father, Robert Helton, Sr., presented the award during a special ceremony.**

NCJOA's second vice president, and service locally with the Interagency Child Abuse Council, the local Safe Schools Task Force, With Friends, and the Gaston County Child Advocacy Center. He has been instrumental in collecting gifts and donations to help families

five years of service in the Youth Bureau. Capt. Helton's service to help children includes service as

in need at Christmas. He served as master of ceremonies for the police department's 2006 Silent Hero program, which 150 people attended to recognize 34 students in Gaston County Schools in Gastonia who have made a positive impact through community service. He also helped to coordinate the department's Special Olympics Torch Run this year.

"Capt. Helton's personal conduct is beyond reproach and sets an example for other officers to follow," said Gastonia Assistant Chief Tim Adams. "He is a well-respected member of his community and is active in his church."

## GPD Tidbits, continued from page 6

Office of Professional Standards, Laura Biggerstaff to the Street Crimes Unit, Heather Houser to the Detective Bureau, and Ricky Lovingood to the Youth Bureau. Jamie Prather is a Community Coordinator for the Central District.

\*\*\*Nine new officers were sworn-in at a ceremony May 23. They are Jeffrey Bryson, Bryce Carr, Boyce Falls, Gladys Grier, Freddie Hurt, Brooks Luckadoo, Eleanor Talbot, Nicholas Talarico, and Michael Vaughn. Tracy Bess has returned to GPD and is assigned to the East District.

\*\*\*The Gastonia Community Watch Association elected officers at a June 18 quarterly meeting. New officers are: President Linda Parrish (Westside), Vice-President Jerry Campbell, Secretary Trip



**Five new police officers have their badges pinned on by family members during a swearing-in ceremony July 3. New officers, left to right, are Matthew Sherrill, Michael Rudisill, Robert Pendleton, Melissa Karls and Jason Gill.**

Haynes (York-Chester), Treasurer Leesa Lusk (Midway), Parliamentarian Shirley Cooper, Sergeant-At-Arms Freddie Crawford, and Chaplain Rev. Andy Raines (Fairview Baptist Church).

\*\*\*A retirement celebration was held for Carl Breakfield on

June 28 in the Community Room. He was praised for his loyalty and steadfastness.

\*\*\*A retirement celebration for Capt. Max George is scheduled for 2 p.m. Aug. 1, in the Community Room. Wanted posters for attendance have been posted.



## **A Great Torch Run Year For GPD**

**More than a dozen runners participated in the local Torch Run May 18 to benefit Special Olympics North Carolina. This year marks the 21st year of the North Carolina Law Enforcement Torch Run, a great year for GPD as fundraising results are, for the first time, within \$200 of reaching the \$6,000 goal. A fundraiser at the Outback Steakhouse, selling food and drinks at the Gastonia Sniper Conference, and selling Torch Run T-shirts and hats have been successful activities. Another fundraiser is likely to be scheduled soon to meet the goal which has a fall deadline.**

**Gastonia Police Department  
Office of Public Information  
P.O. Box 1748  
Gastonia, NC 28053**

PRESORT STD  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT 220  
GASTONIA NC