

# THE BLUE LIGHT

## Bulletin

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Gastonia Police  
Department

Terry L. Sult, Chief of Police

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### Inside

**Greetings From  
The Chief**  
Page 2

**Crime Analysis  
Beefed Up &  
Renamed**  
Page 3

**GPD Hosts  
Dive Operation**  
Page 4

**CSI: Gastonia**  
Page 5

**Watch Out  
for the  
Winter Blues**  
Page 6

**Sgt. Firrantello &  
Det. Swanger  
Receive CSI  
Certification**  
Page 6

**Police Assaults  
Decline in  
Gastonia**  
Page 7



### New GPD Car

A 2003 Cadillac has been awarded to GPD through District Court as an illegal proceeds forfeiture in a felony drug case. The car, which previously sold for \$27,500, will be used for recruiting, Crime Prevention and anti-drug programs. Technology support installed the blue lights and siren. The decals are by Signs Now. (Photo by Chris Goddard)

## Workload Issues Examined

**Capt. Chuck Lifford**  
BLB Writer

**D**o our cops work when we need them most? That is the question the Gastonia Police Department wants answered.

The agency contracted with Peter Bellmio, a nationally recognized expert in police workforce deployment to review our staffing patterns and workload. Though this was only a preliminary analysis, Mr. Bellmio provided helpful training and insights to the command staff about the factors to consider when making staffing decisions.

Mr. Bellmio has contracted across the United States doing this type of consulting work for many years. Some recent projects include developing a new patrol shift for the Los Angeles PD, a staffing plan for the Puyallup Police, and a Patrol Staffing Analysis for the Calgary Police. One of his services is a willingness to go

before political bodies explaining the result of his analysis. If an agency is suffering from an actual lack of manpower rather than facing deployment problems he will say so.

“Pete Bellmio recently did a staffing study for our patrol division which has resulted in a commitment from our city council for a 10 percent increase in our patrol division effective our next fiscal year,” Puyallup Police Deputy Chief Jim Coller said in a recent email.

For GPD, Mr. Bellmio primarily focused on reviewing the principle of examining the workload our officers face and assigning the appropriate number of officers at that time. Though a simple concept, the many factors affecting police deployment caused this to be a complex problem. He illustrated the impracticality of having the same number of officers working at all times without any

(Please see **Workload**, page 2)

# Greetings From The Chief Is The Honeymoon Over?

Is the honeymoon over? OK, everyone says the honeymoon period for a new chief is about 6 months and you better get things changed in that short time frame. I am not sure if there really is a honeymoon period or not; what I do know is the Gastonia Police Department's employees comprise some of the best leaders in policing. Thus, the honeymoon period is irrelevant as we press forward.

For the first time in the past couple of years we expect to see the UCR crime numbers go down. The preliminary numbers show an overall drop in crime of 5% with property crime down 4% and violent crime down 8%. The validated numbers will be released in a few weeks. Over the holidays the East District rolled out several responses to larcenies in the Westfield mall area. Their efforts

realized over a 50% reduction in crime this year as compared to the same time frame last year.

The Central District saw the near elimination of larcenies at targeted convenience stores in a problem-solving project they worked. The West District is working a long-term collaborative project in the Parkdale neighborhood resulting in equally impressive outcomes. Officers in all areas of the department, despite demands on their time, are finding time and putting forth extra effort to Prevent Crime Through Problem-Solving.

Each of these efforts reduced the number of calls for service and reports taken by officers in the field. They are great success stories. The Assessment Phase of each project reflects the dedication each and every employee demonstrates everyday. We all

recognize the police cannot reduce crime without the help of the community. So it also reflects the value of the partnerships either formed or enhanced during the process.

We still have frustrations with change (or in some areas the lack of change), we still face challenges in manpower, pay and other areas. Open communication is still required at and between all levels of the organization to work out differences of opinion and share experiences.

Honeymoon period or not we are making progress! Congratulations on a job well done and keep up the good work.

Terry L. Sult  
Chief of Police

## Workload Data Collection To Change

(Continued from p. 1)

consideration for demands for service.

The class examined the principles associated with shift relief factors so that personnel issues such as training, court, sick time, and other administrative duties were taken into account. Another import factor was identifying citizen requests for service that tie up officers' time – requests that are not part of the

police department's primary mission of law enforcement or crime prevention.

At the end of the session MIS staff members were provided with examples of several types of time/duty reports to incorporate with the new software. These recommendations will be incorporated into our New World software installation.

This is an initial effort by our police department to help our agency evolve into using the

problem oriented policing philosophy effectively. Everyone knows that for officers to engage in community efforts, they need enough proactive time to initiate activities.

However change does not occur swiftly.

Our new CAD system will need to gather the appropriate data in sufficient quantity so an analysis can be conducted and the appropriate shifts in scheduling made as needed.

# Crime Analysis Beefed Up; Renamed

**Donna Lahser**  
BLB Editor

The Gastonia Police Department is beefing up its crime analysis unit to develop a more statistics-driven approach to fighting crime. The expanding unit has a new name: Problem Analysis and Research Center (PARC). New staff members are Amanda Neese, Darcie Bergandine and Matt Phillips.

Ms. Neese joined GPD in May as the PARC administrator, and previously worked with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's Research, Planning and Analysis Division. She holds a bachelor's degree in Resource Management from George Mason University and a master's degree in Public Administration from Pennsylvania State University.

In Charlotte, Ms. Neese had the opportunity to work under two

different police chiefs: Dennis Norwicki and Darrel Stephens who had different strengths: vision and being more statistics-driven, respectively.

"Chief Sult is a blend of both

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... to develop a more  
statistics-driven  
approach to  
fighting crime.

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and is very data driven which is a good thing, but it puts a lot of responsibility on us as well," she said, adding that PARC's purpose is customer service. "Our purpose is to get information out to our customers: captains, sergeants, police officers, civilian employees, citizens and other agencies."

Other PARC staff are Ms. Bergandine who started with GPD as a volunteer, but began working part-time, 15 hours a week, Jan. 1

as the department's coordinator of Operation PEACE (Prosecution, Education and Community Evolution). Her duties include econometrics, a study of how economic development and crime affect each other.

Mr. Phillips, a part-time Geographical Information Systems analyst, started Dec. 12. He has a military background in imagery analysis and will be working 20 hours a week with Brad Herndon who is currently assigned to assist the Central District and Investigations.

Brad is also picking up West and East Districts and Special Investigations until a crime analyst vacancy created by the departure of Mike Bess is filled.

Joe Talley is serving as a resource officer with duties such as updating the policy manual; survey development and analysis; special projects; and hot sheets for investigations.



## Det. Morton Recognized

Det. David "Doc" Morton received one of the first annual awards from Gaston College and the Advisory Board to the Criminal Justice and Paralegal Departments. The award recognizes substantial contribution to the professions. Pictured, left to right, are Capt. Chuck Lifford, Judge Jesse Caldwell, Det. Morton and his wife Kimberly, and Joe Cagle, chairman of Criminal Justice & Paralegal programs. (Photo by Det. Heath McMullan)

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# GPD Hosts 2-Day Dive Operation

**Sgt. Phil Firrantello**

BLB Writer

Unbeknownst to most Gastonia Police Department family members and the community or often misunderstood by members within our own organization is the GPD Underwater Search and Recovery Team (USAR) or often-called Dive Team.

Don Williams and Danny Cochran unofficially started the team back in late 1970s and officially in 1984. All team members are certified scuba divers with as a minimum NITROX (enriched air) training which allows a diver to stay at greater depths for longer periods of time, up to members certified as Dive Masters.

The USAR Team trains at least one day per month and averages 12 call-outs or requests for searches both within and outside our jurisdiction per year. Over the years search and recovery efforts included operations around various local bridges, lakes and ponds, resulting in the recovery of numerous weapons: one used in a Charlotte homicide case, and another in a DEA/SC Law Enforcement Division homicide.

Other search efforts included those for Asha Degree in Cleveland County as well as search efforts for current and cold cases for CMPD, the FBI, and five other counties in two states.

USAR diving is much different than recreational diving in pristine warm waters with the clarity of the Caribbean Sea. USAR diving is

most often done in what is termed as "Blackwater" diving, or not being able to see your own hand against your mask. Combine that with a diversity of underwater obstacles, and potential chemical and/or bacterial conditions for which specialized equipment is employed.

The Gastonia USAR Team utilizes traditional scuba diving equipment, as well as specialized equipment such as surface supplied air and communications, vulcanized dry suits for contaminated water,



**Sgt. Firrantello and Officer Brent Clevenger assist other divers during a recent two-day Dive Team operation and exercise in the South Fork - Catawba River.**

commercial style dive helmets and an underwater ROV (remotely operated vehicle) which has a camera with its viewing screen on the surface, for those times when visibility conditions lend themselves to its use. But in most instances, everything done in the way of searching for articles of evidence to victims is done by feel, with your hands.

A planned dive operation was conducted on Oct. 25 & 26th as a training/article search endeavor at the request of a member of our

Criminal Investigations Division. There was some vague information that evidence tied to a serious offense may have been discarded somewhere in the vicinity of Dale's Landing in Belmont, or somewhere along the sides of the Highway 29/74 bridge spanning the Gaston-Mecklenburg County lines.

Assisting in the dive aspect were members of the Burke County Sheriff's Department and Gaston Emergency Medical Service USAR Teams, while the Gaston County Police Department Boat Patrol, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department Lake Patrol and Mt. Holly Fire & Rescue provided safety and security to the divers from any potential recreation boaters in the area.

The Belmont Fire Department, and South New Hope Fire Department provided on-site compressed air tank refills saving the operation considerable time and expense. The NC Center for Applied Textile Technology allowed us the use of their facility as an operations briefing location.

The North Carolina Justice Academy sponsored the training/search and recovery operation that allowed the participants to gain 12 hours of continuing education credits. At any given time 25-35 individuals were involved in the daily activities.

Both mornings the divers were greeted with air temperatures ranging from 38-40 degrees. Teams of divers were members from different agencies working together

(Please see **Dive Team**, p. 7)

# CSI: Gastonia - A True Crime Story

By Det. Eddie Green  
BLB Writer

The explosion of television crime dramas has peaked interest in the role of crime scene investigators. Popular TV shows such as *CSI: Miami* and *CSI: Las Vegas* along with documentaries like *Forensic Files* and *Cold Case Files* has opened an inside view into the world of forensics.

Long before the television shows, though, Gastonia had a crime scene unit. In 1947 Lt. E.E. Rankin went to the FBI Academy in Quantico, Va. While there he had classes where he was exposed to fingerprint patterns, collection and preservation of evidence and the basic understanding of crime scenes. Once back in Gastonia, he took it upon himself to become the first crime scene officer. It was not a full-time position, but basically meant that he carried a fingerprint kit and began to interpret evidence at major crime scenes. In fact, for many years when there was a major crime scene, officers would call upon newspaper photographers to document the scene for court.

Lt. Rankin was promoted to Assistant Chief and later Chief of Police so Det. C.M. Ferguson, who had an interest in crime scene investigations, took his place and worked major crime scenes part-time as well as performing other duties in the Detective Bureau. Det. Ferguson was promoted to captain over the Detective Bureau in 1963.

In the late 1960s work in the

Identification Bureau became full-time. The I.D. officer responded to all major crimes. His duties included fingerprinting and photography as well as collection of evidence at crime scenes. Evidence was stored at the police department to be shown in court and the black and white photographs were taken to a local photographer to be developed. Any fingerprints developed at a crime scene were filed until a suspect

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We, as crime scene officers, are regularly asked how our job compares to the *CSI: Miami* television show.

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was developed and a fingerprint card was rolled on him.

The I.D. Bureau grew in proportion to the police department and the city; however, there were no major advancements in technology throughout the 70s.

In the early 80s the unit was comprised of four detectives and the supervisor, Capt. Marvin Barlow. During this time officers were busy processing prisoners, then developing the black and white mug shots as well as processing crime scenes. A major portion of the officer's day was spent crouched over a magnifying glass looking at fingerprints. If a good print was developed at a crime scene and there were no suspects, officers often went

through the thousands of fingerprint files one by one searching for a match. This was a very time-consuming and eye-straining job, but very satisfying and exciting when an identification was finally made.

In the late 1980s the I.D. Bureau was changed forever when the AFIS (Automated Fingerprint Identification System) was purchased through a state grant. Now we could search unknown fingerprints on file at the GPD with known offender files statewide. Detectives Butch Clemmer and Leo Williams spent the better part of each day sitting at the AFIS computer entering the thousands of old fingerprint cases and many suspects who thought they had gotten away with crimes years earlier were suddenly arrested on fingerprint identifications. It was a thrilling time in the I.D. Bureau.

Many more changes were made in the 1990s. Color photography was long thought to be too graphic for jurors to view in court, but in 1991 Capt. J.R. Deaton purchased 35mm cameras and we began using them at crime scenes, but with black and white as a backup until it was certain that the color photos would be accepted. Officers using state of the art darkroom equipment developed all crime scene photos.

When Sgt. Phil Firrantello took over as supervisor in 1994, advanced training became a priority within the bureau. Several

(Please see **CSI: Gastonia**, page 6)

# Counselor's Insight

## Watch Out For The Winter Blues

By Chaplain Warner Doles

BLB Columnist

The Christmas and New Year's Day holidays are not always the best of times for people. Some folks struggle with depression during the winter months, basically because of the reduction of light. The more serious are those who have suffered significant loss during the past year or years.

Christmas can be difficult because it is usually the time when family and friends come together. And a recent death of a loved one, a divorce, or some other significant loss, is emotionally amplified during this time of the year. Old wounds and hurts are often remembered during the holiday season. Grief has many stages and it takes time to work through them all. Sometimes it make take years before it is

completely put to rest.

Feelings are neither good nor bad, they just indicate something is taking place in a person's psyche. If old feelings return for you this time of year, try changing your routine. Emphasize different physical activities. Change your eating habits. Avoid being alone. Try new things or new ways of doing things. Little things like this can help you avoid the Winter Blues.

## GPD Tidbits

### Firrantello & Swanger Certified

On Sept. 1 Sgt. Phil Firrantello and Det. Jimmy Swanger received their Crime Scene Investigator Certification from the International Association of Identification (IAI).

The IAI is a professional organization open to those involved in the forensics field and is represented by 75 countries worldwide. Future plans include certification of remaining members of the GPD CSI unit, which will make us one of only a few departments, which include CMPD, to have all of their CSI's certified through the IAI.

\*\*\*The following officers have been selected as Police Training Officers (PTOs) - West District: D. Dover, E. Howard and J. Hansen; Central District: E. Lovingood, H. Houser and M. Elliott; East District: T. Bess, M. Smith and D. Lingafelt.

\*\*\*The following transfers and

appointments are in effect: Officer James L. Bryant has transferred to the Detective Bureau; Det. Steve Colvard has transferred to the Central District as Community Coordinator; Officer Charles Ray has transferred to the Street Crimes Unit; and Det. Rodney Aldridge has been appointed a Hostage Negotiator.

\*\*\*Det. Mike Schwartz was sworn in Nov. 8 as a Deputy U.S. Marshal. He is part of the Charlotte Electronic Crimes Task Force and will be working with the U.S. Secret Service.

\*\*\*A retirement ceremony was held Nov. 30 for Marshall Turner, GPD range attendant. A World War II veteran in his 90s, his work ethic and character were praised.

\*\*\*Officer Susan Psomadakis is the 2005 recipient of the Duke Power Citizenship & Service Award, given to someone who has made a difference in their community.

## CSI: Gastonia

(Continued from page 5)

nationally known forensic specialists were brought in to train officers. Most in the bureau were sent to schools at the FBI Academy.

Today the I.D. Bureau has changed its name to CSI to more accurately describe the work. We no longer use 35mm film but top of the line digital cameras. Computer forensics is the wave of the future and officers are being trained to keep up with the ever-changing times. DNA has changed the way evidence is being handled and promises to help solve crime in years ahead.

We, as crime scene officers, are regularly asked how our job compares to the *CSI: Miami* television show. The normal reply is we can't solve every crime in an hour, but with technology we can solve many of the crimes that occur in Gastonia through forensics.

# Trainer's Corner

## Police Assaults Decrease in Gastonia

By David "Doc" Morton  
BLB Columnist

Assaults on Gastonia Police Officers have decreased quite significantly from 2000 through 2004, according to statistics on the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation web site. There were 65 assaults on Gastonia officers reported in year 2000, 56 assaults in 2001, 32 assaults in 2002, 25 assaults in 2003 and 18 assaults in 2004. That's a 72.3 percent decrease in assaults on Gastonia Police Officers during this 5-year period.

During the same time frame, there was an overall statewide increase of 14 percent for assault on law enforcement officers. In 2004, there were 2,004 assaults on North Carolina law enforcement officers with over 2000 officers being assaulted with the offender's hands, fist, and feet.

Why have assaults on Gastonia

officers decreased so significantly? We are still arresting lots of bad guys and girls. We still respond to numerous domestic calls, disturbance calls, and conduct hundreds of traffic stops that result in making arrests.

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... there was an overall statewide increase of 14 percent for assaults on law enforcement officers.

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My first thought is to credit the officers themselves. Gastonia Police Department is blessed with good officers that have a winning mind-set. Officer safety training has been taken to a new level since year 2000. Officers have been given more realistic officer safety and combat training using paint bullet guns, RedMan Integrated Use

of Force drills, Weapon Retention drills, High Risk Traffic Stops scenarios, Rapid Deployment, Close Quarter Self-Protection and Control Tactics, Ground Fighting and Combat drills using live fire.

When Gastonia officers train, they train to WIN! The officers then carry their training and winning mind-set back out into the community, better equipped with tactics and even more mentally prepared to protect themselves and the citizens in their districts and communities. There could be some other reasons that have contributed to the decrease such as the use of OC Pepper Spray, verbal de-escalation, or even the possibility of some misreporting.

I challenge all my brothers and sisters of the thin blue line to continue to protect yourself, each other, and the citizens of our great city. Train hard and always train to win. In our profession, Second Best Is Not an Option!

## Multi-Agency Dive Team Operation

(Continued from p. 4)

to build professional partnerships and take advantage of varying dive and search protocols utilized by the different teams. Shoreline search teams were faced with soft mud surfaces, fishing lines and hooks and broken glass, while the teams working the bridge had to deal with underwater trees, debris, and old nylon boat rope floating among the trees and debris. The target item was not recovered, but other items were.

Special thanks to Sgt. Mark Lanier, Officer Gary Johnson, and Det. Kevin McSwain for logistical support and food. GPD USAR members are Brent Clevenger, Bobby Duncan, myself, John Jarvis, Heath McMullan, Ryan Putnum, and Don Williams.

## Rookie Roll Call

### Photos not for Web site publication

Left to right – Meredith Brafford, Records clerk, hire date: 12/12/05; Lisa Carpenter, Records clerk, 12/5/05; Jaime Kiser, Records clerk, 12/12/05; Jefferey Lubert, police officer, 7/18/05; Mathew McDonald, police officer, 9/26/05.

### Photos not for Web site publication

Left to right – Bruce Moore, police officer, 7/25/05; Julia Taylor Myers, police officer, 9/26/05; Matthew Phillips, GIS analyst, 12/27/05; Lex Popovich, police officer, 12/12/05; James Prather, police officer, 10/3/05.



## Christmas Giving

Some members of Gastonia Police Department's Criminal Investigations Division gathered Dec. 19 to give two tables filled with gifts they purchased to two children met through the Youth Bureau. One child ran to Det. Jeff Hawkins and hugged him after initially arriving in the Community Room. Punch, cake and other Christmas snacks were enjoyed by all.

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