

Escanaba Public Safety, Gary Lark

It seems to me that any information a public safety officer always starts at the beginning and in my case it would probably start when I first started college, taking a lot of basic requirements at Bay College, and then going on to Northern, finishing up in a criminal justice degree and later applying for different positions around the U.P. I spent years here in the Escanaba area going to ?????? and also Escanaba public school systems. After graduating from Northern it was a six month delay in between my graduating and getting a job. I was later contacted by several departments and one of them was my home town. After looking at most of the other prospects, I chose Escanaba Public Safety Department. Soon after I had married my wife we had three children and we now live here in the Escanaba area. Continuing on public safety, is a fairly new concept one of which is not real wide spread throughout the United States, Public Safety is a concept of combining a fire department and a police department and then cross-training both people so you can do both jobs. So at night we have a group of approximately eight people on at the public safety department. Two people will be on the fire floor, which control the fire trucks and all the live saving equipment that we have stored inside our fire hall. Also we have four people on patrol and one main man working communications. When I first started in our department we were approximately 44 people and we had just been combined by a person named Gill Truex. He was hired from Detroit Police Department, and he was one of the top comminisioners on their department at that time. He was able to pull the men together and cross-train everyone and at that point public safety started in Escanaba. It was 1975. I was hired later in 77. When I was hired the feelings of most of the officers and the firemen who were combined was actually really poor. They didn't like doing both jobs. They were forced to do it; they had been working in those positions for many years. It seemed to be that the animosity between the officers and the firemen continued even into this date in 1987. Slowly we filtered out many of the undesirable people and people that didn't really want the concept had quit and the ones that are left now are accepting the public safety as it was designed. During this time there was a lot of available money for the public safety department. Our city of approximately fifteen thousand was able to obtain grants from Michigan State University, the state of Michigan, the federal government, and other law-enforcement agencies that have money. Through those other operations we were able to obtain new communication systems, a computerized ??? system that connects us to all other ??? terminals in the United States including the FBI and the CIA and everybody else who would be hooked up to these special units. We have access to all that information. Also we were able to get new uniforms, guns, a large amount of money to build our buildings, gym equipment, a new fire truck, and all the lines and hoses and ????? that go with it. I think it was probably over a million dollars that was involved in the switch over.

The concept of public safety when I started in 77 was to combine both the fire and the police department and then reduce



your man power over the years. The Public Safety Department had been reduced from a 44 man department down to a 32 man department as it is right now. The city of Escanaba is continuing to cut in different areas. As it stands right now, we are about to lose a large amount of money through a special grant that had been governing our department for many years. And if that is lost we will probably again lose more people. How this will effect the actual operation of Public Safety is unknown.

Public Safety after cross-trained will continue to work as it is right now. Public Safety, my own idea, is actually a good one. You are working with the same people that are on the road; you work with the same people that your at the fire. It never changes. If you need additional man power at a large fire, you call people back and we've never had any problems with people not coming out.

I have approximate 240 hours and one half of my phase as a fire fighter one. I just completed a second phase of another 240 hours which will make me fire fighter two and I have yet to tested for it. That is just the basic time for fire fighting. On the other hand, your police department is constantly sending you to schools and other institutions to upgrade and familiarize yourself with new equipment that is being brought in and laws, rules and regulations. As a whole, I think, our Public Safety Department does a pretty good job. The people that are working there take their job serious and their able to do their job well because of training. Also we have been able to acquire some new equipment. One of the new vehicles that we're able to purchase was a fire truck with a seventy five foot latter. This latter also has a nozzle attachment, we can pump 1500 gallons of water per minute over a period of several days. These units are build for Public Safety in mind. They were designed and it cost over, somewhere in the area of 250 thousand dollars. Now if you get into the bigger concepts, the larger departments, such as Kalamazoo who just combined, their equipment has already been purchased and they probably wouldn't continue to buy any more new stuff. That is kind of massive move for a department their size. I believe Kalamazoo is probably has around 250 to 300 officers, if not more. The smaller departments appear to have an easier time consolidating the public safety concept rather than the larger departments. As it is right now, we had the first woman public safety officer in the United States, and since then she had quit and we have hired another one. There had been other women public safety officers throughout the United States and they seem to be adapting well also.

I can't really tell you exactly what it would be like to work in a larger department but I can, the concept would be somewhat familiar to me because I have contacted with a lot of people who have in my job we have our calls are concentrated between 8 pm at night until 8 o'clock in the morning. Most of the calls are from 8 pm until 4pm, after the bars close. And on the weekends, of course, is probably the most busiest time. The larger cities who have a higher crime rate because of the concentration of people will have the more dangerous calls than we do per capita. We still do get certain amount of violence happening in Escanaba; there is a lot of fights, the same as other big cities, but we don't get as

many gun and knife halls. They work in more of a say Detroit Police Department works more of a three and four man cars and we recently been split up to one man cars to control the city of Escanaba. As it is right now, I'm happy where I'm at, I wouldn't want to leave. The only real draw back that I have right now in my job would be the hours that I work. Because of the slow down of the nutrition, the stop of man power, I'm stuck on midnights and so is everybody else. It will be many, many years before we'll be able to get off this shift. Most of our departments runs off of seniority basis. And because of that, you're on one shift, you get into a rut and sometimes you can develop bad habits, but if you can overcome those odds and your family has been able to overcome those odds its not a bad line of work, if you don't mind working early morning hours or working afternoon shifts. Any other information right now, I can't think of anything else Jim.

JH: Sounds good Gary, thank you very much.

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