



EDITORIAL

EDITORIAL: Griffith police hoping to expand diversity



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If there's anything we've learned as a nation from the protests in Ferguson, Baltimore, New York and elsewhere in the past year, it's that diversity on the police force is important to building or maintaining good rapport with the public.

"It's a matter of trust, and a lot of that trust is as simple as representing the community

that you're in," Griffith Police Chief Greg Mance said.

Mance has partnered with Indiana University Northwest and the Griffith Family YMCA in hopes of increasing diversity in his department and, perhaps, other local departments as well.

"This isn't a Griffith issue, this is a regionwide issue," Mance said.

2010 census data for Griffith show 52 percent of the town's residents are female, nearly 17 percent are black, and 13 percent are Hispanic. That's a big contrast with the police force, which has one female officer and one male officer with Hispanic heritage. The rest are all white males.

That makes a difference as officers interact with the public.

Women involved in domestic disputes tend to be more comfortable talking with a female officer, IUN professor Joseph Ferrandino said. Diversity on the police force also helps officers see other points of view better.

Mance noticed during the last hiring process that women couldn't pass physical tests, and minority applicants had trouble passing the written exam.

The YMCA and IUN will help prepare applicants for those physical and written exams in hopes of improving their chances of success.

The physical tests applicants face include a 13.5-inch vertical jump, 24 situps in one minute, a 300-meter run in 82 seconds, 21 pushups and a 1.5-mile run in just under 19 minutes.

"You hate to miss out on an entire career for a quarter of an inch," Ferrandino said.

Ferrandino will help prepare applicants for the written test, including how to approach the test, how to read the questions and how to manage time.

If this works, as it should, the program ought to expand beyond Griffith.

It's a smart move, given all the attention to police department diversity. This isn't about lowering standards, but helping applicants prepare for these tests.

Mance deserves credit for his efforts not just on behalf of his department, but all of Northwest Indiana.