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## Cops pulled from desk jobs to fill patrols

**St. Paul's budget deficit meant fewer police officers on the street than the chief wanted this summer — so he ordered administrative officers out to patrol. The mayor, a council member and the police union are seeking a permanent solution.**

BY MARA H. GOTTFRIED  
Pioneer Press

On most days, Tim Lynch wears a suit, sits at a desk and wades through paperwork that keeps the St. Paul police homicide unit running.

But on a recent evening, the senior commander donned a police uniform, squeezed into a bulletproof vest and took the wheel of a squad car to do a job he hasn't tackled for almost a decade: patrol officer.

His shift included pulling over a car blasting loud music, arresting a suspect who allegedly tried to rob a 63-year-old man and checking out a report of a screaming woman.

Lynch's temporary job change stemmed from an order police Chief John Harrington made in June. The chief reassigned more than 20 officers from administrative and investigative posts to patrol duty for the summer. In addition, he required everyone who doesn't normally work the streets, including Lynch, to take one patrol shift per month through September.

It's a short-term fix for a bigger problem, Harrington said.

"We're woefully understaffed," he said. "We have about 125 cops less than we need to do the job the way the public wants us to. It's a frustration I hear echoed all over the city."

The city is trying to address the issue, even in the face of a projected \$16.5 million budget deficit in 2007.

Mayor Chris Coleman's proposed budget includes an additional five officers and an 8.5 percent property tax hike. The department's sworn strength would rise to 581, the largest authorized in recent city history, but it falls short of the 100 new officers Coleman's predecessor, Randy Kelly, wanted to add by 2010.

Council Member Dan Bostrom, a retired St. Paul police officer, recently came forward with a plan for an additional 20 officers, for a total of 25. Bostrom's plan would include a 9.5 percent tax increase.

And the St. Paul Police Federation is planning to launch a "manpower" campaign this fall, calling for 40 extra officers to be added to the department next year. They are pushing to hire 125 additional officers by 2009.

"There would be a point where you have enough officers, having enough time to do proactive work, and there would be a reduction of crime in the city," said Dave Titus, the police union's president.

Facing a summer with fewer cops on the streets than anticipated — the 2006 budget called for adding 25 officers to its ranks this year, but the number was cut to 12 because of the 2007 budget deficit — and calls for service up 28 percent since 2003, Harrington unveiled "Operation Force Multiplier" in June.

Requiring all nonpatrol officers to work three patrol shifts this summer amounted to an average of six extra patrol officers on the streets a day, combined with the more than 20 officers temporarily reassigned to patrol.

Through the end of July, crime was estimated to have fallen about 6 percent citywide, compared with the first seven months of last year.

"It was the right thing to do, and it's part of why we've had a good summer," Harrington said.

Beyond the primary goal of beefing up the police presence on the streets this summer, Harrington had loftier ideas. He paired nonpatrol officers, who tend to be more veteran officers, with regular patrol officers, who are usually newer to the department, in the same squad cars. He said in June he hoped they would learn from each other.

That seemed to play out when Lynch, who joined the force in 1979, and officer Tim Moore, a St. Paul officer since 2000, worked together earlier this month.

Moore, 34, showed Lynch, 49, how the computers that are now in every squad car work.



SHERRI LaROSE-CHIGLO, Pioneer Press  
St. Paul Police's Senior Cmdr. Tim Lynch, left, and Officer Tim Moore, right, take a look around the perimeter of a home during their evening shift on Aug. 18.

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A patrol officer until 1987, Lynch said "we had mobile display terminals, kind of like dumb boxes" in the squads. "This thing has a lot more capacity and it's a lot faster."

Lynch was a sergeant and lieutenant in patrol and assigned to a number of investigative units. He now runs the homicide unit, crime lab and property room.

When Lynch started as a patrol officer, he estimated, he wasn't responding to calls 30 percent to 40 percent of the time and was able to do "proactive police work" during the down time.

"Now, it's 5 to 10 percent because they're going from call to call to call," he said.

In announcing his plan, Harrington acknowledged there was a trade-off to temporarily moving some officers from investigative units.

"We haven't missed anything, but some things have slowed down — property crimes, how quickly we can get to some of those cases," he said.

Some people have mentioned they could see a difference this summer with the extra officers on the streets, Bostrom said.

"There are times you have to do extraordinary things to accomplish the goals," he said. "I don't think that's the way to solve longtime problems you're facing. That's why we need more officers."

Coleman is open to looking at Bostrom's proposal, but "our only hesitation is that there can't be any budget gimmicks associated with it," said Bob Hume, the mayor's spokesman.

"We're not going to engage in any magic budget math that brings us officers we can't fully fund with permanent revenue," he said.

The police union has hired a consultant to help organize its upcoming manpower campaign. Its slogan is "2 few cops = 2 much crime. 125 new cops by 2009."

The union uses the ratio of police officers per 1,000 residents as a measure of how many officers the city should have. They point to Midwestern cities with populations of 250,000 or more, a category where St. Paul falls behind.

Outside the Midwest, St. Paul fares well compared with cities around the country of similar populations.

The union has computed how much it would cost to add 40 officers to the ranks next year, even if they must be funded completely by tax increases. The median taxpayer would pay about \$1.88 extra a month in 2007, said Michael Shannon, the federation's consultant.

"The problem is, they're running from pillar to post," he said. "When a department becomes reactive instead of proactive, it's hard to stay ahead of the (crime) curve."

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