

Hermitage police get new uniforms

- By DAVID L. DYE Herald Staff Writer

HERMITAGE — The city's police officers sported a new look Monday as the department unveiled its updated uniforms.

Until Sunday, the department's uniform had featured a collared shirt over a bulletproof vest, and dark grey khaki pants. Aside from a change in 2013 when the shirt went from baby blue to grey, Hermitage police Chief Eric Jewell said the uniform had remained largely unchanged for about 25 years.

The new uniform features a black shirt, underneath a black protective vest, and gray pants. Lettering, badges and insignia are in white on the vest and shirt, forming a sharp contrast with the vest and shirt.

"We now have 360-degree identification, which is something we didn't have before. And even in the dark, it's instantly recognizable," Jewell said.

The decision to acquire new uniforms was driven by three main factors, Jewell said.

The first factor was equipment access, as the uniform's vest allows police officers to carry more equipment, including additional ammunition, stun gun, pepper spray, handcuffs, tourniquet, flashlight, first aid kit, and more body armor. Compared to the old uniform's more formal style, Jewell said the new uniform reflects the increased tasks police officers are being asked to perform on duty.

"It's not just our department; it's a national trend," Jewell said. "Officers are having to carry more equipment and do more when they're on call."

The officers' physical health was a second consideration, as Jewell said many officers experience lower back pain due to carrying at least 20 pounds of weight on their hips. Sitting at a desk or in a police cruiser can also be difficult or uncomfortable, Jewell said.

“By bringing the weight up higher, that alleviates the stress on the lower back and spine,” Jewell said.

The third factor was comfort, as the old uniform’s shirts were made out of a cotton mix with the body vest kept underneath the shirt. While the top half of the uniform didn’t “breathe,” Jewell said the khaki pants didn’t help the officers’ maneuverability either.

“There were times you might rip your pants vaulting over a fence or climbing into a dumpster for evidence,” Jewell said.

Since the new uniforms went into use Monday, Jewell said morale has been high among the officers. While the increased mobility and decreased belt weight is appreciated, Deputy Chief Adam Piccirillo said officers are still getting used to changing their gait without compensating for the weight or limited mobility.

“When you were wearing the old uniform, having the vest underneath the shirt and the shirt tucked in almost made it feel like you were being pulled forward a little,” Piccirillo said.

However, it’s still a welcome change over the previous uniform, Traffic Safety Officer John Kudelko said.

“It definitely feels like your posture is a lot better wearing the vest and everything,” Kudelko said.

For officers inside the police station on break or filling out police reports, the vest can be easily removed. However, detectives or plainclothes officers can put the vest on over top of a traditional collared shirt and tie and be ready to respond to a call, Jewell said.

“Instead of having pieces of equipment throughout an office, you can have all the equipment in one place and suddenly have everything you need very quickly if you need to go out,” Jewell said.

Each officer in the Hermitage Police Department received a set of three long-sleeved shirts, three short-sleeved shirts, three pairs of pants and a vest. The Fraternal Order of Police union split the uniform costs with the city — through the officers' annual uniform allowances.

Hermitage city commissioners approved the new uniforms.



