



# **One week in: New Bethalto Police Chief looking toward the future**

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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BETHALTO – The people of Bethalto have a new chief law enforcement officer.

Former Bethalto Deputy Chief Craig Welch was promoted to chief at a Monday, May 14, meeting of the Bethalto Village Board. He replaces the retiring Greg Smock, who

had served for 30 years on the force. Welch himself started as a dispatcher in 1990-91, becoming an officer in 1995. Welch said his deputy chief will be Jason Lamb, saying the two of them have a great relationship – especially when it comes to investigations.

As for his administration, Welch said he would like to tackle an issue the village has had for a decade – since the financial crash of 2008 – a lack of employees.

“We don't hire someone new when someone leaves,” Welch said. “When someone leaves for vacation, we have to rely on overtime. Overtime is cheaper, but it is not a practical way to solve that problem.”

One of the first new hires Welch expects to make will be a school resource officer for Civic Memorial High School, which currently is going without one.

This lack of staffing has not made the people of Bethalto any less safe, however. Welch said another problem in the village is the fact he feels people believe they are “too safe” due to the increasingly effective job the police department has been doing.

“We have some of the most well-educated officers in the area,” he said. “Pretty much all of our officers have a bachelor's degree, which is pretty standard these days, and they all continue training every year. We've prosecuted everything from stolen bikes to homicide in the village, and we tend to solve our crimes pretty fast. Because of that, people sometimes forget to lock their doors and cars and take precautions.”

Welch used the example of multiple car break-ins over the 2017 Christmas season for the need for people to take precautions, even with a capable police force. Welch said “significant” arrests were made in that case as well.

Under Welch, the Bethalto Police Department will strive to continue its progress of education and technology integration, he said.

But, the title of “chief” is still settling for Welch. He said he went to the gym after his promotion and everyone yelled “chief!” at him. He said it was a new experience and laughed, saying he did not know how to react.