

“Police Wellness” Discussed By Glen Carbon Police Chief, Counselor

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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GLEN CARBON - Glen Carbon Police Chief Todd Link recently gave a presentation on the importance of police wellness to the Glen Carbon Village Board of Trustees at their meeting this week. He said the health and safety of the village depends on the health and safety of its police officers.

“My job, in short, is to make sure that I protect the lives and property of all the residents in our village,” Link said. “To do that, I must first lead the way for wellness in our police staff.”

The chief said the term “Police Wellness” applies not only to sworn police officers, but also to the more than 40 dispatchers and other civilian employees within the department. He added the Glen Carbon Police Department is fortunate to not be facing any lawsuits or staffing issues.

“We’re fully staffed and we’re very effective at all levels,” he said. “If we damage our relationships, if we have problems with compassion, fatigue, and burnout, that’s going to cause problems in our community, that’s going to cause us to lose the support and the trust of our community.

“If we have a strong Police Department that’s made up of people who are well and healthy, that reflects in our community with the job that they do to protect lives and property.”

One slide of the presentation was dedicated to the “debilitating stressors” a police officer can experience over the course of a typical 25-year law enforcement career. A series of “critical incidents” can lead to “cumulative stress,” which can then impact the village. “Critical incidents” can include everything from “Fatalities/Suicides” to “Social/Public Criticism,” while “cumulative stress” can take the form of sleep loss, low work-life balance, substance abuse and more, which can then impact the village by damaging community relationships, causing lawsuits, and more.

Link acknowledged how commonly mental health is stigmatized, even within Police Departments, which prevents the vast majority of officers from asking for help when they need it. As a result, officers face statistically higher rates of substance abuse disorder, divorce, and mental health challenges compared to the general population.

Link was joined by Dr. Ken Kubicek, a licensed clinical professional counselor and 16-year “veteran” of the Police Dept., who Link said will be taking over as the department’s Wellness Coordinator next year. For the next three years, Link said they will work together to take a “holistic approach” to police wellness by addressing physical, financial, and emotional needs.

Physical issues, including an unusually high likelihood of developing metabolic syndrome, will be addressed by teaching officers about proper sleep, nutrition, and exercise habits. Financial problems often stem from officers having no “Plan B” and finding themselves “aimless” once they’re no longer a cop, so Link said they’ll also be teaching them how to budget and save for retirement, as well as how to plan earlier in their career to transition out of law enforcement. To address emotional well-being, officers can connect with counselors of their choice and attend Critical Incident Stress Debriefings, in addition to several other components of this “holistic” approach.

Kubicek said these Critical Incident Stress Debriefings signify how far the perception of mental health within policing has changed over the decades.

“30 years ago, the attitude was, ‘We signed up for this. Pull yourself up by the bootstraps.’ That’s changed over 30 years,” Kubicek said. “Now when there’s an incident, even maybe a patrolman or a firefighter will call the chief and ask for a debriefing, and they’ll call us in.”

Kubicek of Chief Link and Sergeant Steven Deist: “I’ve never met two people who were so committed to the mental health of their law enforcement officers, and I applaud them for it, and certainly they can be the model for other police departments in the community.”

A full recording of the Nov. 15, 2023, Glen Carbon Village Board meeting is available at the top of this story or on the [Village of Glen Carbon Facebook page](#).