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LPD seen as an integral part of area's quality of life

Continued from Page 1 (here) – I think this is a good thing,” Previte said of the latest results.

He explained he views the department as an integral piece in the River Region's quality of life, and the survey adequately conveys that sentiment.

“I have already been aware of the unique relationship, the unique support, that we have in this community for police. But still, when stuff comes up like this, you can imagine – even if you put something out and you're asking for feedback or criticism about (it) there's a part of you that's nervous,” he said. “Nervous anticipation; not really knowing, hoping. I like to think that we're doing a good job here. I hope that we are. And this kind of helps.”

Previte said survey respondents came from throughout the River Region, with Town of Lewiston residents representing the highest number at 41.8% (292 responses), followed by the Niagara Wheatfield School District with 35.2% (246), the Lewiston-Porter School District at 28.2% (197) and the Village of Lewiston with 15.3% (107).

Demographics noted 60.9% of responders identifying as female, 35.8% identifying as male and 3.3% preferring not to identify. Age-wise, those between the ages of 31 and 50 led the list at 51.4%, followed by age 50 and older at 39.7%. Lower response numbers were seen in the age 22-30, 16-21 and under-16 age groups.

And of those who did respond, the majority of answers came across as favorable to LPD, its management, its personnel and its operations.

Previte reviewed the response to question No. 7, “How confident are you that issues are properly handled by Lewiston Police Department?” Here, respondents were asked to rank their answers on a 1 to 5, lowest to highest grade, followed by a N/A category.

“Broken down, the 5s (the fifth row of responses) were 52.3% collectively (favorable); then the (combined) 4s and 5s (totals) were 78.2%,” he said. “So, that percentage, keep in mind that (a score of) 3 would be average. So, 78.2% saying that we're 4s of 5s, I

Local LAW Enforcement

was pleasantly surprised – it's encouraging to us.”

In question No. 4, “What do you believe the greatest strengths of the Lewiston Police are, the greatest strengths of the Lewiston Police Department?” “We had 698 responses, and the majority, probably the biggest percentage in there was community involvement, and professionalism, but (with an) emphasis probably more on visibility and community involvement. You see them all the time,” Previte said of Lewiston's officers.

“The biggest comment we got are things I want to hear: ‘They're visible; they're interactive; we see them; they live in our community; they're part of our family as far as the community.’”

Previte said the survey also found strong community response as to respondents' safety at well-attended events in the community, such as Artpark concerts and Lewiston's festivals.

On the question, “How safe do you feel at the following,” more than 400 responders gave the LPD the highest score for safety at Artpark events, and close to 500 answered with the highest ranking for Lewiston events.

“I was encouraged to see that,” Previte said. “If you look at No. 6, ‘How safe to you feel’ ... especially with the climate (anti-police) they way that things are, I was happy with that response. The concerts we try to cover as well as the festivals.”

He gave full credit to Lewiston's diverse staff of male, female and minority officers, and how they are effectively utilized at Lewiston's broad range of events.

“A lot of the officers I have out

there, (they're) there for a reason,” Previte said. “I have officers here that I know are ‘go-tos’ and I try to (be) smart on how I use them. At events, I know who I want walking the street. It's one of the strengths of this department. And the other thing is ... not only do they (residents and attendees) see them during the course of their duties at those events, but they (the community) see them at those same events in the regular clothes with their families. I think that is even more important, because they are part of the community.”

Previte went on to note the positive impact his department has had in the area's largest school district, Niagara Wheatfield.

“The second-largest responding group (in the survey) was the Niagara Wheatfield School District,” he said. “(But) the biggest difference – (and) it has helped a lot on our outreach – is that a lot people don't seem to realize with Niagara Wheatfield (is) a lot of that district is in the Town of Lewiston. Since we have had our cooperation, our interaction ... since we have had a full-time SRO in that school, (it) has made a world of difference – not only with the school but the school district, which includes the people who don't live in the (actual district), but in the (neighboring towns).”

“(They) have more interaction with my officers, my department, than they do with their own police department where they live, because of our SRO. Because they are part of the school, they are actively involved with stuff going on their kids' lives as well. So, that has really helped us.”

“SRO's help build the relationships with kids (and) when they are down the road – in law enforcement,” he said. “I can't tell you how many times we run into kids, even something like DARE – my officers when you see them on a call – it helps diffuse a situation because maybe this guy is 20, 25, now, and they'll say, ‘You taught me DARE in school.’ That changes the whole (thing). It just brings it right down. It helps things because they recognize them. They've been part of their life before.”

“I was surprised by that (response) and encouraged by that. That was interesting.”

So what's the next step for LPD with the state's Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative? Previte said its purpose “was to identify anything that we needed to address.”

“(While) the majority of things were positive, the things that were mentioned in (the survey) SEE PREVITE, continued on Page 13

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