

# Police recruits face new field training

By Joanne Mallazewski  
staff writer

Accountability is the rule of the road.

With 440 hours of basic state-required police academy training, new Farmington Hills police recruits have only begun a long training haul that will qualify them as bona fide police officers.

Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer announced Monday that a long-planned recruit officer training program is in full swing.

The program is designed to serve as "a safety net" to ensure any mistakes made in the police officer selection process are identified before recruits complete their 18-month probation, Dwyer said.

"Farmington Hills is the typical law enforcement agency," said Bruce Sokolove, a consultant who

helped police develop the five-phased field training program. "This program ensures that all the T's are crossed and the I's are dotted."

Police academy training is not enough. Lack of police officer training walks hand-in-hand with increased civil and criminal lawsuits against law enforcement agencies. The program is designed to provide a "better quality officer and to keep the liability down," Dwyer said.

"POLICE ARE being certified as police officers and they should not be. They are going to cause their departments trouble in the future," Dwyer added.

Dwyer expects the Hills training program to serve as a model for other law enforcement agencies, the majority of which either have training programs "in name only" or not at all. Less than six agencies in

Michigan and less than 5 percent in the country have field training officer programs, Dwyer said.

"The police academy does an excellent job of equipping our recruit police officers with the basic knowledge and skills, but there's a wide gap between the 440 hours of the academy's curriculum and practical application of the material in a community setting," Dwyer said. "This program effectively closes that gap."

Following police academy graduation, the department's four new recruits, for example, will be teamed with specially trained veteran officers, called field training officers.

The department's 21 FTO's completed a 40-hour training and certification course enabling them to train new recruits and the department's 17 probationary officers.

From the day recruits begin the 16-week academy, they are on probation for 18 months with the Hills department. For the first 90 days following graduation, recruits will pass through four phases of training.

THE FOUR phases are designed to familiarize the recruit or probationary officer with the community and coach the new employee in the practical application of police skills. Skills covered in the first four phases include criminal statutes, city ordi-

nances, conflict mediation, criminal investigation and traffic enforcement, Dwyer said.

Recruits and probationary officers are evaluated either on a weekly or monthly basis, depending on which training phase they are in. Provided the officers complete all phases successfully, the fourth phase culminates in allowing the officer to be in the car by himself, FTO coordinator Sgt. James Whitcomb said.

"We are very critical of them in the process," said FTO Gil Kohls. "We don't compromise our ratings. If an officer doesn't have what it takes, he won't be a police officer."

The new officers actually will spend more than 50 percent of their 18-month probation in the fifth training phase, during which officers apply the skills and techniques they've learned. Officers also will have more written tests to pass during this phase.

Finally, the new officers will go before a confirmation board, chaired by Deputy Police Chief Milt Spencer. FTO evaluations during the five phases will be used to determine whether the new officer stays or goes.

"If a lawsuit is filed (by a terminated officer), we have the proper documentation to stand up in court," Dwyer said.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Police Chief William Dwyer (left) is flanked by and Sgt. James Whitcomb (right), FTO coordinator, at a press conference Monday morning to announce a new Farmington Hills police recruit training program.

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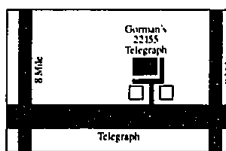
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