

The Pueblo Chieftain

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Police recruits have varied backgrounds



Jim Billings

4 of 8 local recruits are Coloradans.

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THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

She was previously a cashier at Wal-Mart.

His work history includes a director of sales and a senior account manager for a private company. Another woman served as a counselor at the YWCA before turning toward a career in law enforcement.

The professional and educational experiences of the current group of eight recruits for the Pueblo Police Department varies like their written aspirations and goals of serving and protecting the community.

The majority of candidates that have applied since 2003, when the police department began requiring any type of bachelor's degree from an accredited institution, are Pueblo natives or have lived in

Colorado for sometime, according to Chief Jim Billings.

"Most (applicants) are living in Pueblo when they apply," the chief said last week. "This current group of candidates is a good cross section and is representative of other recruitment classes." The Pueblo Police Department requires its applicants to have a bachelor's degree in any discipline to join the force.

Only 2 percent of city law enforcement agencies in the country require that, according to the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

Lakewood is the only other Colorado city aside from Pueblo to require four-year degrees, according to a Web search.

However, according to the chiefs association's Web site, the current trend is for applicants to have college credit equal to two years.

According to a 2006 USA TODAY report, smaller cities generally have no trouble finding recruits with college degrees. However, larger cities like Plano, Texas, in late 2006 eased their hiring requirements and began accepting those with two years of college or three years in the military.

Most larger departments have stalled in requiring bachelor's degrees because of concerns about recruiting minority officers in urban areas and fears that salaries would not attract those with college degrees, according to the Police Association for College Education.

Louis Mayo, executive director of the Police Association for College Education, said most departments give higher pay to recruits with four-year degrees. The same goes for some departments for recruits with military backgrounds, according to newspaper reports.

Some Pueblo officers criticize the education requirement.

For Billings, the standard makes Pueblo a trendsetter.

Of the eight current recruits training to be Pueblo officers, half were not born in Pueblo or Colorado. Three of the remaining four were born and raised in Pueblo and one is from the Denver area.

The non-Colorado natives grew up in New York, New Mexico, Maine and England - three of those having military backgrounds.

Of all the candidates, at least six live in the city of Pueblo and have done so for at least a decade, if not the majority of their lives.

Half of the class has degrees from Colorado State University-Pueblo, in liberal arts studies, sociology, criminology and psychology.

The others have degrees, ranging from sports medicine to black studies, from the University of Northern Colorado, Colorado School of Mines, National American University and the University of Phoenix.

Applicants' birthdays range from 1966 to 1985, the majority having been born in 1982.

LAW OFFICERS AND COLLEGE DEGREES

- 16% of state police agencies require a two-year college degree
- 4% require a four-year degree.
- 13% of county police agencies require a two-year degree
- 9% of local agencies require a two-year degree
- 2% of local agencies require a four-year degree

Source: International Association of Chiefs of Police Web site, <http://www.theiacp.org>.