

The Pueblo Chieftain

Your print and online news source for Southern Colorado

Published: January 31, 2009

A woman's touch

Nine of PD's latest 17 hires are women



CHIEFTAIN PHOTOS/ JOHN JAQUES -- Deb Romano, a female Pueblo police candidate, takes aim at a target during an exercise at the police shooting range.



Brandi Halverson (center in cap) is one of the female candidates for the Pueblo Police force. She joins fellow male candidates in a pointing, shooting exercise at the police firing range.



Jim Billings

**By NICK BONHAM
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN**

The Pueblo Police Department has increased its numbers, the majority of new officers being female.

In 2008, Pueblo City Council approved hiring 12 new officers. Through retirement the department was able to hire five additional officers.

In total, 17 officers were hired - nine women and eight men.

The recruits began training at the department's in-house academy earlier this month. The class will hit the streets after May 15, when they're scheduled to graduate from the academy and begin a 16-week patrol training program. "That's the first time we've had more females than males in the class," Chief Jim Billings said in a recent interview. "I'm surprised, but this is a pleasant surprise. This is historic for the Pueblo Police Department."

This latest class of recruits brings the total of female officers to 31, and the total number of sworn officers to 205.

According to the Civil Service Commission, the hiring agency of the city of Pueblo, 47 people applied for the department, of which only 26 were qualified.

"What that means is those who weren't certified were either a semester or two shy of their bachelor's, and that happens quite a bit, or they flunked the test, didn't have a driver's license, or things like that," said Toni Selman, Civil Service administrator.

The Pueblo Police Department is one of the few departments nationwide that requires a four-year college degree of its new officers.

Fourteen of the recruits are Pueblo County residents, the other three are Coloradans, Selman said. Nine are in their 20s, six in their 30s and two recruits are 40-and-older.

Of the recruits, five are Hispanic and that includes both genders.

"This shows the community that everyone has the opportunity to become a police officer. It's not race or gender biased," Billings said. "There are people that take the position that females can't do the job, and I disagree. There are still naysayers. But as time goes on, I hear that allegation less and less. I think we are evolving out of that mindset that only men can be police officers."

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were an estimated 94,000 female officers in the United States in 2008.