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Riverton names police chief

RIVERTON - After a lengthy search and despite pending results of a shared-services study with two neighboring towns, the Borough Council has appointed a police chief.

Greg Willis, a seven-year veteran of the borough force, was sworn in during a public meeting Wednesday night.

"I'm very excited," Willis said Thursday. "It's an opportunity that every police officer would like and I'm fortunate to have this opportunity."

Willis, 33, will oversee a department with four full-time and two part-time officers. The Cinnaminson resident and Palmyra High School graduate attended the Gloucester County Police Academy. He has been a full-time officer in the borough since 2002. Before that, he was a part-time officer in Palmyra.

"We felt he was qualified," Mayor Bob Martin said Thursday. "He's done a great job and we think he'll continue to do a great job as chief."

Willis said his main goal is to build on the department's strong relationship with the community.

"We have a small police department and we're already very community-oriented," he said. "We want to stay involved with the school and the businesses in town."

The department had been without a chief since Robert Norcross retired July 1 after a 30-year career on the borough force.

Patrolman Matthew Kirk, the borough's longest-tenured officer, had served as the lead officer until the council appointed Willis.

Councilman Bill Brown, who leads the Public Safety Committee, said the search for a chief started in July. He said a committee of former chiefs, including Norcross, interviewed Willis and Kirk.

Brown said the Public Safety Committee held a series of interviews with the two candidates and also biweekly meetings with them. Finally the Borough Council reviewed the qualifications of both candidates before it decided on Willis.

"We had no leader, no supervisor on the street," Brown said. "We have two experienced officers but neither had supervisor experience. We went through three months of meetings and interviews. (Willis and Kirk) were both good candidates. They're both good cops. It was a



As his wife, Amy, holds the Bible, Greg Willis is sworn in as Riverton Police chief on Wednesday by solicitor Bruce Gunn.

unanimous decision to go with Greg."

Brown described Willis as an enthusiastic, personable and take-charge person.

"He thinks outside the box," he said.

The decision to hire a chief comes as a merger with the Cinnaminson and Palmyra police departments remains a strong possibility.

Patriot Consulting Group of Neptune City, Monmouth County, is conducting a state-funded study to determine if the three departments should merge.

In August, officials said they would wait for the results of the study before they decided on hiring a chief. However, Brown said Thursday that the borough no longer could operate without one.

"We felt it would be in the best interest for our town to hire a chief," he said.

During a public meeting in August, Brown acknowledged that some officers had expressed concern about not having a chief.

"I think a division was starting to form here because there was no supervisory individual," he said. "Matt was the officer in charge but (he and Willis) split duties. We wanted to put the focus on one person. We needed a leader and it was a very long process to find one."

Brown and Martin said the Borough Council is still interested in what the study recommends.

"It was explained to Greg in the beginning that if the shared-services agreement took effect, it could mean a demotion," Brown said. "He understands that."

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