Bristol chief resigns; reasons are not offered

By BEA LEWIS
Sunday News Correspondent

BRISTOL — The town’s police chief, Michael F. Lewis, has resigned.

Lewis had been placed on indefinite administrative leave Sept. 5, for undisclosed reasons. Lt. Kris Bean has been heading the department.

Lewis had confirmed he was on leave but said it was a personnel matter and that he couldn’t comment.

Town Administrator Nicholas Coates said selectmen accepted Lewis’ resignation Wednesday.

“The Select Board wishes to thank Chief Lewis for his service to the Town of Bristol. The Town takes very seriously its obligation to protect the privacy rights of employees and former employees, and as a result the Select Board will not be commenting further,” Coates wrote in an email.

Requests for further comment from town officials were not immediately returned.

Lewis joined the department in 2004, rising to the rank of lieutenant heading the department in an interim role for about six months before selectmen promoted him to chief.

He succeeded John Clark, who stepped down in August 2010.

In May, Jonathan Francis, who now works for the Franklin Police Department filed a wage-claim lawsuit against the town, charging he worked 71 weeks while attending the State Police Academy in Concord and wasn’t paid all of his overtime.

The town filed a counterclaim, as Francis had signed an agreement requiring him to stay with the Bristol department for 36 months after he was certified or pay a pro-rated penalty to allow the municipality to recoup training costs.

In an amended response to the town’s counterclaim, Francis said he broke the contract and sought employment elsewhere because of the administrative tone set by Lewis.

In his suit, Francis recounts responding to a domestic violence call with New Hampshire State Police in which a man had threatened to kill his children with a shotgun.

When Francis reached for the shotgun in the cruiser, he discovered no round had been chambered for immediate use, as protocol requires, the suit claims.

Francis’ suit alleges that when he told Lewis his life had been endangered by the unprepared shotgun, Lewis “just laughed,” the suit says.

The suit claims Lewis criticized Francis for speaking to other officers and had indicated that selectmen didn’t want Francis as an officer.

The suit also alleges that Lewis spoke with the town’s attorney and that Francis was going to be “sued big time,” and allegedly had called Franklin Chief David Goldstein asking him not to hire Francis.

The suit also alleges Lewis allowed Franklin police to review Francis’ personnel file, which the suit alleges contained a false notation that Francis had been charged with an open container violation.

The suit claims Francis felt his career was in jeopardy if he remained with the Bristol department and he resigned. The lawsuits remain pending in Grafton County Superior Court.