Incoming chief calls out ‘rogue’ police officers

On the issues: Carlo Capano talks body cams, chief days, more.

BY KEVIN ANDRIGAN
New Hampshire Union Leader

MANCHESTER — Incoming Manchester police Chief Carlo Capano wants his city’s residents to know the two fired officers accused of coercing a woman to have sex in exchange for dropping charges against her were “rogue officers” who bear no resemblance to the other officers who wear the uniform in New Hampshire’s largest city.

“They are rogue officers; that’s exactly who they were,” Capano said.

“We have 237 police officers in this...”

See Chief, Page A8

► City Hall column: Former union head calls “chief days” an abuse of power. • A3
► Meet the chief: Read a profile of Chief Carlo Capano at www.unionleader.com.
build and you don’t see them going out and doing things like this.

"Is it going to happen from time to time? Obviously, it can. It does. We acted quickly and handled it appropriately the moment we were aware of it."

With internal and criminal investigations well underway regarding the actions of fired detectives Darren Murphy and Aaron Brown, Capano said he’s limited in what he can say.

But during an interview with the New Hampshire Union Leader last week, Capano answered quickly and sharply when asked his first reaction upon hearing of it.

"I was clearly disgusted by an officer who was going to do something inappropriate like that. We never are happy to hear when we have an officer doing something clearly wrong and way past the pale," Capano said.

"We constantly tell people accountability is huge and you will be held accountable if you do something wrong."

Capano said he can’t describe in detail personnel policies such as regulations governing a police officer must wait after having contact with a suspect and when to have a relationship with that person.

"I can’t get into specifics. I can say we have standard operational procedures that dictate who you should have a relationship with and who you should not," Capano said.

"We have a policy in place that says you (Murphy and Brown) shouldn’t have done that and you knew you shouldn’t have done that."

Victims, witnesses and confidential informants need to be assured all is done to assure their safety and protection, Capano continued.

"When we deal with any case, any kind of case, the witnesses and victim know we have their back," Capano said.

"If we find out something is happening, we would act on it immediately. We would never put anyone in harm’s way."

Chief day practice

The soon-to-be chief is letting the departing one, Nick Willard, handle the controversy over chief days, the practice of rewarding officers with a paid day off that doesn’t count against earned vacation time.

But Capano, who has been on the force in Manchester since 1996, backs up Willard’s contention that it was not a recent creation but a practice that’s been in place for a long time.

"Was I aware of chief days? Those have been happening since I was employed here. It wasn’t anything to me," Capano said.

Earlier this week, former mayors and some former chiefs denied knowledge of the practice. Among them was Mayor Joyce Craig’s father-in-law, Louis Craig.

Former Chief Craig, who served from 1991 to 1994, denied ever giving an officer a paid day off and said he told Willard that, "I, Louis Craig, as chief of police, never, ever gave anybody a ‘chief’s day’ and you will not find a document with my signature on it giving somebody a day off and it’s called a chief’s day," Craig said.

On Saturday, Willard produced a letter signed by Craig to an unidentified officer named Al giving him a day off for his work solving an April 10, 1991, pizza shop burglary.

"In recognition for your fine efforts it is my pleasure to give you a day off with pay," Craig wrote in the signed letter.

Capano resists the notion that at any point chief days have led to fewer cops on the beat. "We would never do anything that is going to compromise the public safety," Capano said.

Body cameras, residency

The incoming chief said he’s serious about exploring innovation — including installing live cameras in cruisers and/or on the bodies of officers.

"That is something we have been looking at as an agency, and I’ve had a few demos at this point," Capano said.

"It’s definitely something I’m interested in, and I am looking at different grants that would make it possible. I certainly would never rule them out and I am an advocate for them."

A residency requirement for police officers to live in the city would not be wise, Capano believes.

"I live in the city, I work here. My kids go to public schools here. I love the city of Manchester, but I do think it’s a personal opinion on where officers choose to live," Capano said.

"Spouses have jobs outside the community as well and that can affect choices. Look at (2006 slain) Officer Michael Briggs. He didn’t live in Manchester and he gave his life for this community. You don’t have to live here to be willing to do anything to protect it."

And Capano believes the morale in the ranks is good and that’s not simply because unlike other public unions, police officers have an existing contract.

"I think morale is very good. The officers have the support of the administration, support at City Hall and we have the best equipment we could possibly have. All of that plays into morale. It’s not just money; it is an open line of communication, an open door, that is what builds morale.

"Money is not everything. I don’t think just a contract makes you happy."

klindgren@unionleader.com