

COPS,

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within the department — one officer each for traffic, the Community Response Unit (CRU) and detectives, and two for night shifts.

Keizertimes sat down with Teague, Deputy Chief Jeff Kuhns and Det. Chris Nelson to talk about precisely how new officers would change KPD capabilities.

On June 26, 2016, about 1 a.m., Keizer officers responded to the report of a burglary at Cooper's Deli on River Road. While working the scene of that crime, the same suspects are believed to have robbed Quality Inn & Suites a little more than a block away.

Kuhns said creating a secure perimeter, which can be difficult with just three officers on the night shift, might have prevented the second robbery from happening.

KPD has a minimum of three officers on duty between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m., but it would take all three of those officers to create the secure perimeter. Teague said the need for such action happens more frequently than the average citizen might

guess. "And, at any given hour, one of those officers might be at the jail with a suspect or at the hospital taking statements from a DUI crash," Kuhns said.

The addition of one officer to each of the night shifts would alleviate the problem for high visibility crimes like robberies, but it would also have an impact on domestic disturbances, which also occur more frequently in the late night hours.

"Domestics are calls where you simply don't go it alone. You don't go with less than two officers," Kuhns said. "Domestics are some of the most volatile calls police respond to, and that's nationwide."

On the detective unit, a fifth officer would be tasked primarily with property crime investigations. Property crimes take a backseat to persons crimes, like sexual and child abuse and robberies. Sex and child abuse cases constitute about 60 percent of the cases detectives are working at any given time, said Nelson.

"We have a number of times when good leads on property cases come in, but we simply don't have the time in the day to dedicate to them," Nelson said.

Even in cases where the evidence is strong, the lack of

ability to coordinate with other agencies might mean connections aren't made.

"We've gotten a number of reports about organized retail theft groups at Keizer Station. These are groups that go up and down I-5 hitting the shopping centers. We get great video and great evidence, but we don't have the time to coordinate with other agencies and put the time into those investigations," Nelson said.

In thefts where less videotape is available, evidence, interviews and leads grow stale, but the persons crimes take precedence every time, Teague said.

"I think that's wrong, but it's what's happening," Teague said. To be clear, he was suggesting that no crime should be placed on the back burner, not that property crimes should be placed at higher priority than persons crimes.

Coupled with certain types of crime not receiving the attention it might deserve, the detectives themselves have become more specialized since the unit was first created in the mid-1990s.

Det. Ben Howden spends much of his time performing digital forensics on computers and phones, a specialty that

doesn't come without significant cost to the department in terms of training.

Major cases also linger over the unit. One detective is still pursuing leads in a case involving the death of a 12-year-old in January, another is now managing the local efforts investigating a robbery at MAPS Credit Union last week. Unlike television portrayals, investigations don't proceed to arrest and trial neatly within 50 minutes.

In the Community Response Unit, there are currently two investigators and a supervisor for a unit that once had four investigators. The CRU inhabits a grey area between patrol and detectives, Teague said. Patrol officers respond to calls that can be quickly brought to some resolution, whereas detectives are in it for the long haul. CRU works cases that involve a level of effort somewhere between the two.

"Persistent neighborhood

problems are their niche," Teague said.

When officers roused squatters from a vacant home near Gubser Elementary School that was becoming a hive of suspicious activity, CRU officers were the ones who spent the time observing the house and the goings on there. CRU officers also provided surveillance in a major drug bust last week (See story Page A1).

Technology has been able to close some of the gap, but when extra bodies are needed it means calling on one of the detectives to help — spreading the agency thinner.

"We're trying to do everything we can with less bodies, but we still need additional officers," Nelson said.

The fifth additional officer would be placed on the traffic unit, which currently only has one officer.

Teague doesn't necessarily think traffic control is the biggest problem the department

is facing, but it's a constant demand of the public.

"Our numbers are low, but the public repeatedly tells us they want more attention put on traffic," Teague said. "And I understand that every resident wants to see an officer drive by once in a while."

Traffic is another area that has been helped with new technology like flashing speed limit signs, which come out of the city's Public Works budget, but the demand for more rarely subsides.

"Our radar reader board is one of the most requested services we have," Kuhns said.

While the chiefs and officers see the gaps a lack of bodies is creating at KPD, it should not be read as an absolution of duty.

Even the unworked property crimes are all entered into a database run by the department's crime analyst, Cara Steele. They remain there and are compared with new cases as they arrive looking for patterns that might warrant more investigation.

"We have always said we will work with what the city gives us. I think we serve the people well, but there are simple things we cannot do without additional officers," Teague said.

"Domestics are calls where you simply don't go it alone."

— Jeff Kuhns
KPD Deputy Chief

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