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KIMBERLY RYAN/NEWS-SUN
Chief of police Ken Bohn, left, speaks to former police chief and now American Red Cross volunteer Bill Murrill during a stand-off in Hobbs earlier this year.

Bohn

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In the past, police officers in Hobbs could not go out and look for traffic offenders unless they were in a marked police car with lights on the top. Bohn thought that policy sent a message that it was OK to break traffic laws as long as there were no cops around.

Bohn had also heard complaints from citizens about bad drivers, so he changed the policy to allow unmarked cars to make traffic stops. He also began using undercover tactics, such as having officers hiding on side streets.

The intended result is not to write more tickets, Bohn said, but to encourage the notion that it is never OK to break traffic laws.

"Hopefully, eventually, people will police themselves and be more self-disciplined, which means our accidents will fall, which means the streets become safer," Bohn said.

Bohn changed other policies as well. One rule stipulated

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Ken Bohn
Hobbs chief of police

that officers only use lights and sirens in response to a few specific situations, which often came into conflict with a state law that said police officers are not considered emergency vehicles unless they were using the lights and sirens and therefore had to comply with all traffic laws. Bohn expanded the number of situations in which officers could use the lights and sirens to keep them in compliance with state laws.

Another new policy required officers to carry recorders in their pockets. They were not required to use them at all times, but Bohn informed everyone that if a complaint was lodged against them and their recorders weren't turned on during the incident, the complaint could go against them.

Having recordings of interactions with citizens would not only protect officers in the case of a complaint, but it would help ensure that the public's rights were protected as well.

Back in Franklin, Bohn spent the first part of each work day examining citizen complaints against officers. He wanted to do everything he could to facilitate good relations between his department and the community.

Now he is trying to do the same thing in Hobbs. Bohn had heard from citizens, officers and city officials that there was a lack of trust toward HPD by some people in the community, so he implemented a policy from his days in Wisconsin.

That policy is called community policing. Under that system, police officers interact with people in the community, get to know them. Most people have little contact with police officers, Bohn said, unless they are the victim of a crime or get caught speeding.

"I want officers to personally know some of the people," Bohn said. "My experience has been that if the people understand what we're doing and we understand what the needs of the people are, No. 1, we can service them better, but, No. 2, they're more supportive for us. It makes for a much safer community."

There is still work to be done at HPD. The department is still short-staffed, with not enough officers or dispatchers. Bohn has not improved HPD's image as much as he would like either, both among the public and the department.

But Bohn is proud of the things the department has accomplished in his short tenure, and he is optimistic about the future.

"While we've still got a long way to go yet, I think we've made positive gains in our image with the community," Bohn said. "I think that's our biggest issue right now is continuing to work on that."

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