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## Filling the Force

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*Burlington, Vermont - February 1, 2008*



Four new Burlington police officers pledge to uphold the meaning behind their badge. They're still probationary-- this weekend, they're off to the Police Academy in Pittsford for sixteen weeks of training.

"It just always appealed to me. I knew even before I went to high school, it's something I wanted to do," explains Burlington recruit Dan Campbell.



But there are not enough Dan Campbells, BPD says. The department's struggling to find new recruits.

"It's a pervasive problem," says Burlington Deputy Police Chief Mike Schirling.

Departments statewide and nationwide are competing for a smaller pool of applicants, as federal agencies like the CIA, FBI, and homeland security have boosted their ranks in a big way following 9/11. Plus, the dangers and rigors of law enforcement can be a turn-off.

"We are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, weekends and on holidays. We haven't closed in 143 years. That can take its toll on folks," says Schirling.

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Even with these new officers, Burlington still needs at least seven more to reverse short-staffing. So the department hopes to get applications from people looking for a career change, even from folks with no criminal justice background: English or biology majors are welcome, too.

"We'll give you the tools necessary to be a police officer," promises Schirling.

Schirling says the impact on his department has been longer hours and more overtime, but that responses to incidents have not suffered. Public Safety Commissioner Tom Tremblay says there are 26 open jobs for Vermont State Police troopers and VSP is already stretched thin. They're covering more and more calls in rural communities that don't have their own police forces.

One way police agencies are trying to alleviate their staffing problem is by increasing advertising. And groups like Vermont Works for Women have stepped up to provide training. That non-profit has enrolled ten women in a law enforcement training program starting next week. [For program enrollment info, you can visit the](#)

[Vermont Works for Women website.](#)

Tremblay says he's also waiting for a state report for what Vermont agencies can do to improve recruitment and retention.

Jack Thurston - WCAX News



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