

Police get donation of bullet-resistant vests, - Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA) - February 7, 2019 - page 001

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After the fatal shooting of deputy U.S. Marshal Christopher Hill last year, city officials realized they needed to modernize their safety equipment to better protect the city's police officers.

Emergency department nurses at UPMC Pinnacle also saw that need, and took "a project of service" over the summer, raising \$20,000 to make that happen. The PinnacleHealth Foundation contributed more money.

On Wednesday, more than 120 pieces of protective equipment — vests, steel plates and helmets — were presented to Harrisburg police by UPMC Pinnacle officials.

"As UPMC Pinnacle ED nurses, we are as invested in preventing illness and injury as we are in helping to heal," said Kathy Flinn, nursing director of emergency services for UPMC Pinnacle. "When our nurses realized that the Harrisburg Police Department did not have enough life-saving ballistic vests for all police officers, they quickly sprang into action."

More than 530 people participated in the 3.2 to Protect the Blue fundraiser organized by the nurses. The event had a slight moderation — a 5k race is typically 3.1 miles, but runners in the event ran an additional tenth of a mile in honor of current officers and those who have fallen in the line of duty.

UPMC Pinnacle purchased the safety equipment from Body Armor Megastore in Pennsylvania, which donated 10 additional body armor vest sets.

In total, the equipment cost about \$40,000.

The vests differ from what officers ordinarily wear during their shifts, as they provide protection against most high-caliber weapons.

In total, 40 Body Armor Level III Ballistic Vests (with steel plates, liners, and pads), 20 additional steel plates and 60 helmets were given to city police.

The equipment would not be used by officers on a daily basis. Rather, they will sign out the equipment when and if the need arises, said Sgt. Tom McGarrity.

He declined to go into specifics as to what sort of assault the new equipment can withstand.

"It's definitely more capable than the standard body armor, the soft body armor, worn by our officers in the street," McGarrity said, adding the new equipment "keeps us safer longer, and lets us do our job more effectively."

Deputy Chief Deric Moody explained that for a normal shift, officers use soft armor that is pliable — if officers needed to use the heavier equipment, they would put it on over whatever armor they were already wearing.

“Previous to now, there was no ballistic armor that we had,” Moody said. “We now have enough to field our officers that are working.”

Moody added that while the department is better equipped, the goal moving forward is to ensure it stays that way.

Both Hill and Chief Tom Carter said the equipment was purchased with the idea of equipping officers for the threats they face daily.

Carter recalled his own tenure as an officer working in the streets.

“When we had a homicide back then, over 30 years ago, we thought that we had the proper vests on that would stop bullets and would save our lives,” Carter said, stressing that officers today often go into scenes without knowing what dangers they may face. “Through time, things change.”

Deputy U.S. Marshal Hill was killed by friendly fire Jan. 18, 2018, while serving an arrest warrant with a task force of law enforcement officers. Police say **Kevin Sturgis** opened fire on police as they were arresting his girlfriend inside the Harrisburg home but he did not fire the fatal shot that killed Hill.

Harrisburg police officer Jeff Cook was also shot during the raid, but was wearing a bullet-resistant vest with a steel plate, which saved him.

After the raid, “it became clear that there were things we needed to do in terms of modernizing our safety equipment, protecting our officers,” said Mayor Eric Papenfuse.

Following the shooting, city officials announced plans to purchase more body armor using a Dauphin County gaming grant.

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