

Russo, Stephanie

From: AYoung7550@aol.com
Sent: Wednesday, December 15, 2010 10:24 PM
To: Russo, Stephanie
Subject: And the beat goes on...and on...and on....

Retired police officer facing lots of questions

GHA security director parks squad in bus zone, among other issues

Comments

December 13, 2010
BY LORI CALDWELL, (219) 648-3258

GARY -- In rain, snow or blazing heat, Clarence Hightower parked his unmarked police squad car right under the sign designating a bus loading zone.

The Gary Housing Authority police services director never received a ticket for illegally parking there.

His persistent disregard for the law -- and the inconvenience he created for Genesis Tower senior citizens who had to step into the street to catch a bus -- will not go unpunished, however.

Chief Gary O. Carter said last week he will demand that Hightower relinquish the 2006 white Ford Crown Victoria today. The car, which was assigned to Hightower when he was a captain on the midnight shift in patrol, should have been returned when Hightower retired in October 2009, Carter said.

Now, Hightower's job supervising and scheduling officers to patrol various GHA properties could be in jeopardy.

"I did not know Hightower was retired," Mike Brown, chairman of the security committee for the housing board, said last week. "The director should be an active, sworn police officer."

Brown said the Gary Housing Authority fought with U.S. Housing and Urban Development representatives who wanted the board to hire private security to patrol its property.

"Sworn officers have their ear to the ground, they know what's going on in the city. That's why a sworn officer should be directing security," Brown said.

Neither housing executive director Alfreda Peterson nor Hightower, a Merrillville resident, could be reached for comment.

Brown said no one "at all" should park in handicapped or bus zones. "When I go to board meetings, I usually come in the Broadway door, so I didn't see the parking situation around the corner," he said. "Senior citizens should be treated with respect."

For months, Genesis Tower residents have quietly and anonymously complained about the security chief's parking practices. Callers to the Post-Tribune feared retaliation if housing officials knew they reported Hightower's actions.

The Post-Tribune observed the squad parked on the north side of 6th Avenue in areas clearly marked "No Parking" several times per month.

The Gary Housing Authority does not have cars for its security officers, Brown said. A federal grant provided two new cars for exclusive use by housing police more than 15 years ago.

Those are out of service.

Many housing officers are full-time police who drive their take-home squads on their second job. Reserve officers have access to a few older units no longer part of the patrol fleet.

Carter noted Hightower retired before he was appointed as GHA security chief earlier this year. When the Post-Tribune alerted Carter to the status of Hightower's squad, he said he told someone on his staff to address the issue.

"I guess that wasn't done," Carter said as he was returning from a training session in Las Vegas about police departments facing financial challenges.

"I'll take care of it myself," he said.

Carter returned home Thursday, but said he would be occupied Friday and Saturday with former Chief Thomas Houston's funeral service.

"I'll tell him to return it Monday, along with the mobile computer. If he doesn't, I'll send my fleet manager to get it," Carter said.

Retired Gary cop retains use of city squad car

Comments

December 15, 2010

BY LORI CALDWELL, (219) 648-3258

GARY -- Police Chief Gary O. Carter has apparently changed his mind about demanding the return of a take-home squad car driven by a retired police captain.

Last week, Carter said he would order Clarence Hightower to relinquish the unmarked squad car he drove while a supervisor in the patrol division, then retained after he retired.

But Monday's deadline came and went, and Hightower continued to drive the white 2006 Ford Crown Victoria with police license plates.

Hightower is the supervisor for Gary Housing Authority security officers. GHA does not have any patrol cars of its own for use by security personnel who patrol various housing properties.

Carter said Monday that Hightower, who retired in October 2009, performs duties as a volunteer reserve officer that require him to have a car.

"He (Hightower) has to be at all special events," Lt. Samuel Roberts said after speaking to Carter on Monday afternoon.

Carter said he wasn't aware of any other reserve officers living outside the city who have take-home cars. Hightower lives in Merrillville.

Three reserve officers who work Emergency Management duties, such as performing traffic control for major accidents, parades and large funeral processions, have take-home cars they use, Roberts said. Those three officers "are called out at all hours," Roberts said.

Carter could not cite a recent incident when Hightower was summoned to an emergency during nonworking hours, Roberts said.

Hightower's duties include supervising the reserve officers' towing detail and "legwork" for various events in the city, Roberts said the chief used as reasons why the retired captain should have the car.

Hightower has been seen fueling the car at city-owned gas pumps.

His use of the squad car first surfaced when residents of the Genesis Towers started to complain that a squad car was often parked directly under the bus stop sign, forcing the senior citizens to walk out into the street to climb onto the bus.

