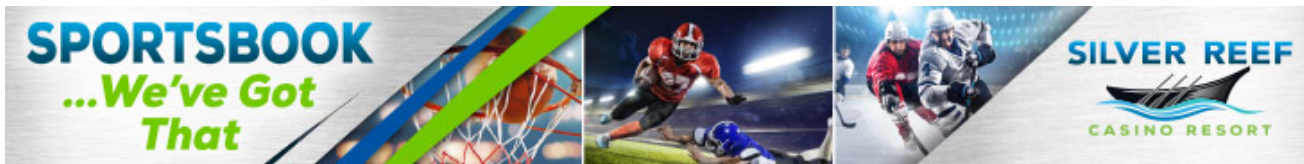


The Northern Light

Blaine and Birch Bay's Community Newspaper



(https://pointrobertsbanners.creativecirclemedia.com/www/delivery/ck.php?oaparams=2_bannerid=189_zoneid=6_cb=29d0d46e9e_oadest=https%3A%2F%2Fsilverreefcasino.com%2Fplay%2Fpromotions)

BPD receives grant for officer wellness program



(https://delta.creativecirclecdn.com/pointroberts/original/20230222-161126-IMG_7863.jpg)

TouchStone counselor Madeline Tompkins presents the first officer wellness education course to Blaine Police Department officers in City Hall on February 15.

PHOTO BY GRACE MCCARTHY



Posted Wednesday, February 22, 2023 4:12 pm

By Grace McCarthy

Blaine Police Department (BPD) received a \$50,000 grant for an officer wellness program that will focus on improving officers' mental and physical health. The grant will provide officers with education courses, therapy sessions and a gym membership.

BPD chief Donnell Tanksley, in partnership with TouchStone Counseling, was awarded the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission (WSCJTC) grant in December.

"The mental health risk often times goes unaddressed," Tanksley said.

The state legislature gave the WSCJTC a one-time allocation to build up officer wellness programs across the state. WSCJTC grants and outreach program manager Susan Rogel said all 28 police departments and sheriff's offices that applied received funding. Bellingham Police Department was the only other organization in Whatcom County to apply for the grant, she said. Tanksley said BPD didn't have a wellness program because it didn't have the funds or space. While the department had policies in place to address wellbeing, it didn't have the resources to address mental health other than crisis training.

TouchStone director of health Erika Creydt helped Tanksley put together an education class series for officers led by Blaine mental health professionals. The education series, which started February 15 and runs until mid-March, will cover topics such as trauma, critical incidents, substance abuse, family dynamics, burnout, self-care, psychological body armor, support systems and suicide prevention.

"I think the first training went well," Creydt said. "I'm excited to do the others."

Officers have the option to attend five sessions at TouchStone Counseling on Martin Street.

"It's been a really stressful time for law enforcement these last few years and they've sacrificed a lot to keep our community safe. It's important they have the support they need and are valued and appreciated," Creydt said. "They risk their lives every day and we don't hear or see about a lot of the stuff they go through."

Officers will receive a gym membership to a 24-hour gym because the Blaine station doesn't have a gym. Officers were also given Fitbit watches to track their cardio, wellness supplements and books such as "The Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement: A Guide for Officers and Their Families" by Kevin G. Gilmartin and "The Body Keeps Score" by Bessel van der Kolk.

Tanksley said he's responded to over 300 homicide and suicides in his 30-year career.

"You don't know when it's coming. You could have two hours where your radio is quiet and the next thing you know, it's a critical incident you have to respond to," Tanksley said. "You have to respond professionally and restrain emotions, so a lot of the feelings are internalized."

BPD requested \$122,000 for electric bikes that didn't get approved. Tanksley said the patrol bikes would have increased officers' ability to patrol the community. Tanksley said he estimates the grant will fund Blaine's program for the next year.

"I'm most looking forward to seeing how we, as a department, improve our physical and mental health," he said. "Hopefully that translates to providing better service to our community."