

KEARNEY POLICE DEPARTMENT



OCTOBER – DECEMBER | 2025

A WORD FROM CHIEF KOWALEK

Over the past four months, I could not be prouder of the men and women who make up the Kearney Police Department. From day one, August 11, 2025, I asked our team to focus on three priorities: treating everyone they encounter with respect, remaining professional in all situations, and being thorough in their work. Over these last four months, our officers have faced difficult and often challenging circumstances, including numerous mental health-related calls, dangerous offender incidents, and tragic death investigations. Through it all, they have continued to serve this community with duty, honor, and integrity.

During the last quarter, KPD has continued to build strong relationships and earn the trust of the citizens of Kearney. Community engagement efforts remain strong and include Coffee with a Cop at retirement homes, Faith & Blue events, mentoring area youth, participation in the Pink Patch Project, the D.A.R.E. program, and completing Hi-5 Friday at every Kearney Public Schools elementary school.

Public safety also remains a top priority for KPD, and the past quarter included several examples of outstanding police work. These efforts include arresting several individuals involved in numerous burglaries and removing dangerous offenders from our community through thorough investigations and decisive enforcement actions.

KPD continues to be a highly sought-after law enforcement agency, as demonstrated by nearly 30 applicants for our most recent police officer opening. Kearney is also an exceptional community, and much of that is due to the strong partnerships among all City departments. It is truly remarkable to work in a city where everyone shares a commitment to doing what is best for the community, rather than for individual interests. I could not imagine serving as Police Chief anywhere else or with any other department.

NEW HIRES/ASSIGNMENTS/PROMOTIONS

This quarter was a busy one for promotions and assignment changes. Sgt JC Small and Sgt Tony Cordova were promoted to the rank of Lieutenant. Following that, Officer Austin Hibberd and Officer Derrick Hosick were selected to fill the two vacant Sergeant positions. Sgt Miller transitioned from Uniformed Patrol Bureau to Special Services. Lt Koettters and Officer Beard transitioned from Uniformed Patrol Bureau to Criminal



Investigations Bureau. Community Service Officer Ethan Mroczek and Josh Goodbrake were hired as Police Officers and are attending the 222nd Basic Training at the Nebraska Law Enforcement Center.

We thank all who assisted in these intensive promotions and hiring processes.



The department also celebrated the following milestone anniversaries:

- 10 years – Officer CJ Hughes and Officer CJ Obradovich
- 35 years – Officer Dave Humphrey

LIEUTENANT AND SERGEANT BYRNE RETIREMENTS

This quarter we recognized Lieutenant Dennis Byrne's 44 years of dedicated service to the City of Kearney and Kearney Police Department and congratulated him on his retirement on October 31st. His wife, Sgt Juli Byrne from the Buffalo County Sheriff's Office was also honored during the celebration for her career at the Buffalo County Jail. We wish them both the very best in retirement and thank them for their dedication to the public safety of their community.

FAITH AND BLUE 2025



This year's Faith & Blue was our 6th annual event and brought our largest turnout yet of churches and community members, a true reflection of the unity and support that make Kearney and Buffalo County so special.

KPD partnered with the Buffalo County Sheriff's Office, Nebraska State Patrol, UNK Police Department, CHI Good Samaritan Hospital Emergency Services, our Unseen Backup program, and 10 local churches: New Life Assembly, First Baptist, St.

James
Catholic

Church, Familias para Cristo Jesus, Kearney eFree Spanish Ministry, Grace Fellowship, Luz Del Mundo, Iglesia Apostolica De La Fe En Cristo Jesus El Salvador, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Alianza Apostolica Cosecha Divina to bring this event to Kearney.

Faith & Blue is a national initiative that strengthens relationships between law enforcement and the communities we serve through partnerships with local faith-based organizations. Across the country, these events bring people together to build trust, break down barriers, and celebrate the shared goal of safer, stronger communities.

2025 OFFICER OF THE YEAR



Officer Austin Hibberd was nominated and selected as Police Officer Association of Nebraska's Officer of the Year. Officer Hibberd started with Kearney Police Department in 2019 and has shown himself to be an outstanding and dedicated law enforcement professional who consistently goes above and beyond in service to the community and his fellow officers.

Since joining the Kearney Police Department in 2019, Officer Hibberd has distinguished himself through his strong work ethic, professionalism, and commitment to excellence. He is known for his proactive approach to policing, sound decision-making, and calm leadership in high-pressure situations. Officer Hibberd routinely takes the initiative to assist others, whether mentoring newer officers, stepping into leadership roles when

needed, or ensuring calls for service are handled thoroughly and compassionately.

Being selected as the Police Officer Association of Nebraska's Officer of the Year is a well-deserved recognition of Officer Hibberd's service, character, and dedication to law enforcement. Officer Hibberd has since been promoted to the rank of Sergeant and we look forward to his continued leadership.



2025 CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Offense	2021	2022	2023	2024	4 year average	2025	Percentage Change
Murder and Nonnegligent Homicide	0	1	0	1	1	0	N/A
Forcible Rape Total	32	41	40	36	37	23	-62%
Robbery Total	7	7	6	6	7	5	-30%
Aggravated Assault Total	59	69	59	63	63	52	-20%
Burglary Total	36	70	61	58	56	34	-65%
Larceny - Theft Total	362	444	515	467	447	357	-25%
Motor Vehicle Theft Total	17	36	59	37	37	33	-13%
Arson	3	2	6	4	4	3	-25%
Total	516	669	746	671	651	507	-28%

The Kearney Police Department remains firmly committed to public safety, and the daily efforts of our officers are reflected in a significant reduction in crime across the community. Through proactive policing, thorough investigations, and working cases from start to finish, officers continue to focus on prevention, accountability, and service.

In 2025, Kearney experienced an overall 28% reduction in crime index offenses compared to the four-year average from 2021–2024. Notable reductions include forcible rape (-62%), burglary (-65%), robbery (-30%), larceny-theft (-25%), aggravated assault (-20%), motor vehicle theft (-13%), and arson (-25%).

These reductions reflect the dedication, professionalism, and teamwork of KPD officers, as well as the strong partnership between law enforcement and the Kearney community. Together, we continue working toward a safer place to live, work, and visit.

HOLIDAY FESTIVITIES

The Kearney community sure knows how to bring the holiday cheer! From the Light Festival at Yanney Park, to Shop with a First Responder, and the Downtown Christmas Walk, KPD officers were honored to be a part of these meaningful events. The third annual Christmas Card Contest did not disappoint and we were amazed at all the submission from our very talented local youth. Congratulations to Hadley from Meadowlark, our contest winner!



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