

NEWS

New Lower Moreland police chief brings focus on community policing



Submitted photo – Lower Moreland Police Department
David Scirrotto is the new Lower Moreland police chief.

By **ROB HEYMAN**

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LOWER MORELAND – For the first time in almost 20 years, the township has a new chief of police, and he’s a familiar face to many residents here.

He’s also someone who brings to the job a wealth of law enforcement training and experience that span more than 30 years, with most of those years spent in Lower Moreland itself.

In January, David Scirrotto was named the new chief of police, succeeding Pete Hasson who retired from the position after 18 years.

Born and raised in Philadelphia, Scirrotto, 49, is a 1987 graduate of Father Judge High School. He joined Lower Moreland as a patrol officer in 1992 after working in security police for the United States Air Force in Japan and for the Department of Veterans Affairs police in Philadelphia.

Over the course of 26 years in the Lower Moreland Police Department, Scirrotto worked his way up through the ranks, obtaining advanced degrees in criminal justice and public administration from the University of Colorado. He teaches at the Montgomery County Community College Police Academy and at the Temple University Police Academy.

As one of the longest-serving members of the police department, Scirrotto said he never wanted to work anywhere besides Lower Moreland.

“My dad always taught me if you have a good job and with job security and you work hard and you move yourself up through the ranks, you can be successful,” he said. “Honestly, I never had any desire to go anywhere else.”

Outside of a distant cousin in New Jersey, Scirrotto said he is the only member of his combined families to enter law enforcement. His father was a teamsters truck driver, and his mother worked as a waitress.

Scirrotto said becoming the department leader seemed a logical next step in his career given his years with the police department and his extensive teaching work with new academy cadets.

“Over the long haul, I began to realize that maybe I had a lot to offer,” he said. “Everything just sort of fell into place.”

Scirrotto acknowledged that he's entering the position at a time when there is greater scrutiny being placed on law enforcement on the local and national levels. It's a challenge for which he's well-prepare.

He said the key to building stronger bonds between police and the communities they serve is putting more focus on community policing, wherein police engage more directly and socially in the community.

"Our responsibility for policing goes beyond just serving the people that live here," he said. "We have to find that way to interact in a positive way with all the different segments of society. It's an interesting evolving problem."

While Lower Moreland may not have the same policing challenges as the larger cities, Scirrotto said community policing still has a necessary place in the township.

"Policing has certainly evolved," he said. "Traditionally, community policing was geared more toward communities that were struggling with the relationship between the police department and its community. What we've seen is the entire profession has realized that it's all our responsibilities to build relationships with all the communities we serve."

In addition to social gatherings like Coffee with a Cop, Scirrotto said he wants his officers in Lower Moreland to begin riding along with young students on school buses so they get to know their police officers and become comfortable with them.

Recently, the Lower Moreland PBA partnered with a local bike shop to buy a bicycle for a girl in the school district whose father died unexpectedly. She was also given riding lessons.

"Identifying families we can make a difference with, that's another priority of mine as a police department – making a difference in every aspect of life we can," he said.

Scirrotto said an ongoing challenge will continue to be finding ways to keep officers from becoming hardened to the human hardships they confront as their careers advance.

"When you look at the challenges of the heroine and opioid epidemic in our society, it's easy for officers to get callous," he explained.

“You have to treat everyone as someone you care about,” he added. “Every officer either has a family member or a friend who has a family member who has suffered from this epidemic. It’s reminding everyone that we should be treating every single person in our life the way we want the people we care about to be treated.”

Scirrotto said the department will also be expanding its number of sworn officers from 22 to 26 this year to accommodate the greater focus on community policing, as well as to address the overall evolving needs of the township. Recent changes, like the creation of a booking center at the department, have helped to improve efficiency there.

“We now process all our DUIs here,” he said. “We used to have to go out of town to get blood draws for DUI arrests. We do all that in-house now in conjunction with Bryn Athyn ambulance.

“All these programs have been designed to make us self-sufficient as an organization,” he added.