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WPD shares insight about USDA Rural Development grants *\$100,000 coming for technology*



Pausing for a group photo after the event, are (from left) WPD Chief Dennis Strow, the Rev. Charlz Caulwell, Mayor R. Gerald Hethcoat, (seated) USDA Rural Development Area Specialist Rebecca Manning, acting USDA Rural Development State Director Joseph M. Mueller, (seated) USDA Rural Development Area Director Stephanie Hodges, Williston City Council President Charles Goodman and WPD Deputy Chief Clay Connolly. (Not pictured, in part because she was also taking this picture, USDA Rural Development Management Program Analyst Michelle Jacobs.)

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Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Jan. 10, 2017 at 11:27 a.m.

WILLISTON -- Williston Police Chief on Monday morning (Jan. 9) shared with listeners information to help the federal government assist people.

The Williston Police Department and representatives of the United States Department of Agriculture conducted a dedication ceremony for two new WPD patrol vehicles funded 75 percent by a USDA Rural Development grant.

Originally scheduled to be at the Heritage Park Pavilion located at 100 N. Main St. in Williston, the program was relocated to be indoors at the Williston City Council Meeting Room in the Williston City Hall complex.

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(from left, Levy County Sheriff's Office Col Mike Sheffield and Chiefland Police Chief D. Scott Anderson speak with WPD Lt. Matt Fortney about the new vehicles for the WPD.)



WPD Lt. Matt Fortney stands behind the door of the new cruiser he is driving now. To the left is the new cruiser used by WPD Chief Dennis Strow.

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This is a side view of one of the cruisers.



WPD Chief Dennis Strow (left) and Levy County Sheriff Bobby McCallum stand in front of the new cruiser that the chief uses for law enforcement in the city.

Speaking during the program were Williston Mayor R. Gerald Hethcoat, WPD Chaplain the Rev. Charlz Caulwell, Williston City Council President Charles Goodman, WPD Deputy Police Chief Clay Connolly, acting USDA Rural Development State Director Joseph M. Mueller and Chief Strow.

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MAYOR R. GERALD HETHCOAT

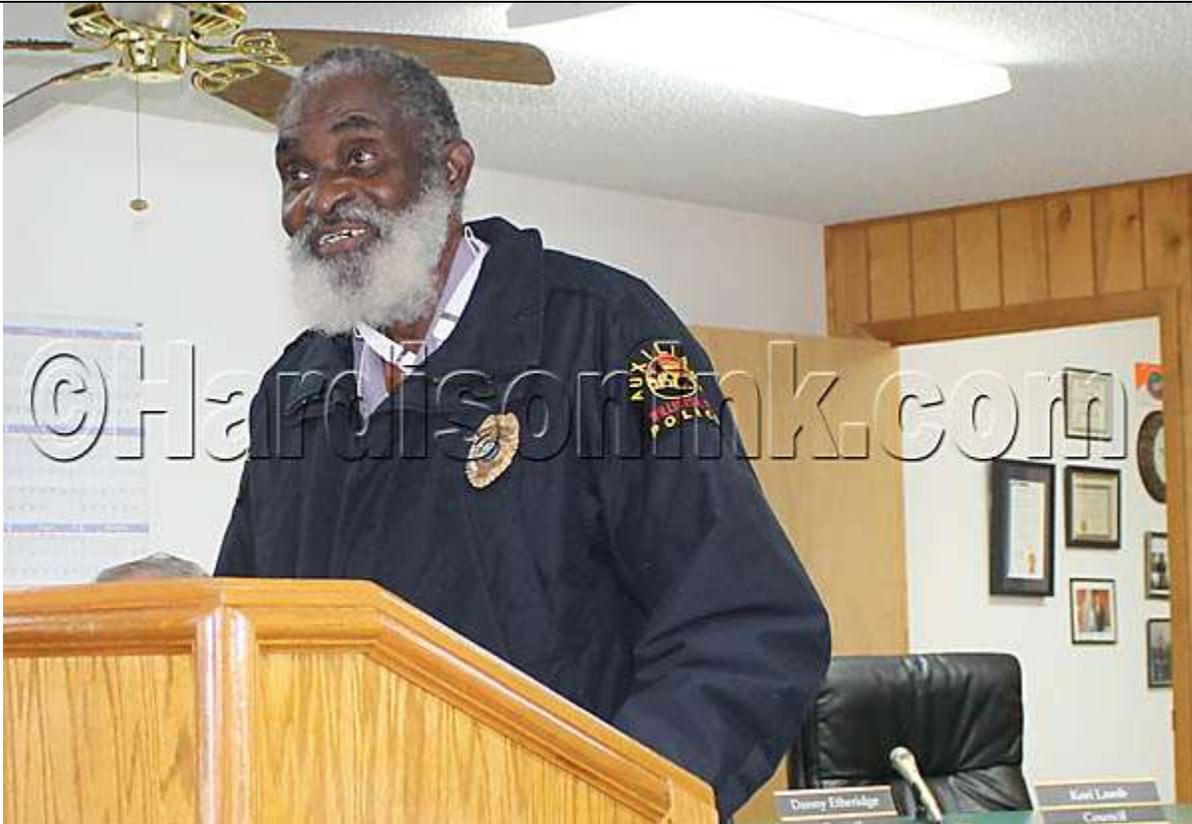
Mayor Hethcoat welcomed everyone to the event as he mentioned some of the many people in the audience.

In addition to USDA Rural Development acting State Director Mueller, the mayor introduced USDA Rural Development Management Program Analyst Michelle Jacobs, USDA Rural Development Area Director Stephanie Hodges and USDA Rural Development Area Specialist Rebecca Manning.

The mayor noted that City Council Vice President Nancy Wininger, City Manager Scott Lippmann, City Clerk Frances Taylor, City Planner Josie Lodder and Williston Fire Chief Lamar Stegall were in the audience. Also attending, were Levy County Sheriff Robert “Bobby” McCallum Jr., Undersheriff W.O. “Brett” Beauchamp III and Levy County Sheriff’s Office Col. Mike Sheffield.

The mayor opened the event by leading the group in the *Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag*.

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THE REV. CHARZ CAULWELL

The Rev. Caulwell opened the meeting with a prayer. Caulwell then shared with listeners that he considered it an honor to introduce President Goodman.



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CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT CHARLES GOODMAN

“You know,” Goodman said as he opened his address, “in small town, U.S.A., we struggle to make ends meet. With the help of the United States Department of Agriculture and the other federal agencies, we would not be able to bring the services we are able to bring to our citizens.”

It is thanks to the talents of WPD Chief Strow and WFR Chief Stegall that the city is able to keep its police and fire departments as well equipped as they are, Goodman said, because those leaders have found resources beyond the four corners of Williston to bring into the municipality to help the residents and visitors of the city.

City Council President Goodman went on to say the employees strive to be good stewards of the resources put in their hands.

“It has been one of the greatest honors in my life to work for the City of Williston in the capacity that the citizens have given me the honor of working in,” Goodman said.

Goodman went on to intimate that he recognizes his status as a politician, and he added that being a politician does not have to include a bad connotation.

“Politicians are supposed to be servants,” Goodman said. “And if you enter into that (profession) with that in your heart, then you have done the best that you can.”

This sentence was used as a segue by Goodman to introduce a man who he sees as public servant, and whom Goodman considers as a privilege and honor to know -- Deputy Chief Connolly.



DEPUTY POLICE CHIEF CLAY CONNOLLY

Deputy Chief Connolly thanked everyone for attending.

Connolly said he sent an email seeking help finding grant opportunities. WPD Dispatch Supervisor Colleen Stevens came up with three of four good ideas, and two or three of those have panned out successfully, Connolly said.

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The deputy chief shared with the audience that he considers himself to be a better law enforcement officer than as a grant writer. However, with the help of the USDA Rural Development staff, Connolly got through the process.

“Stephanie Hodges and Rebecca Manning have been generous with their time and patience,” Connolly said.

Connolly received a list of required forms, and he was given an explanation for the purpose of having those forms, he said.

“Both (of these individuals” are happy to communicate with our (the city’s) finance department and I don’t have to run interference,” Connolly said. “These are not pencil-pushing bureaucrats. They are genuine and universally cooperative.”

Deputy Chief Connolly then noted his appreciation for their excellent level of service provided.

“As our country, state and municipality come under consistently greater scrutiny for the use of our tax dollars,” Connolly said, “I have to think the USDA is providing the citizens with the best bang for their buck, and doing it without a lot of unnecessary administrative expense.”



JOSEPH M. MUELLER

Acting USDA Rural Development State (Florida) Director Mueller first thanked Mayor Hethcoat for moving the dedication ceremony indoors, because it was cold outside (above freezing, but still cold from a Floridian’s perspective).

He reminded listeners that these federal tax dollars is their money being put to use.

Mueller has known Hodges and Manning for years now, he said, and the level of service by them that was mentioned is common from them. There is a consistent level of excellent public service from those employees, he said.

“And the rest of their staff in their office (show that level of service),” Mueller said.

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“They are good people.”

The Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program in Florida is one of about 40 different opportunities from the USDA Rural Development to assist communities like Williston, he said, such as in housing.

The grants are limited in dollars, and they are limited in scope to help first responder types of facilities and equipment, Mueller said.



CHIEF DENNIS STROW

Chief Strow said that when Dispatch Supervisor Stevens told him about this possible grant, he wondered why the United States Department of Agriculture was going to help the city purchase police cruisers.

The chief has been in law enforcement for 43 years, and this seemed different than what one might expect.

Chief Strow met with City Manager Lippmann and the USDA Rural Development representatives and was very pleased to experience the level of helpfulness they provided.

Strow said Hodges, Manning and Jacobs went above and beyond what he expected.

The chief said he stretches every penny so far that he makes copper wire out of pennies.

“This program is absolutely phenomenal,” Chief Strow said. “You will see two marked cars out front that are courtesy of the USDA.”

Within 72 hours of sending USDA Rural Development the invoices for the cars, Chief Strow said, they city was given a payment for 75 percent of that cost – which equals \$46,100 back to the city from the federal government.

And while the cars are pretty and shiny, the \$100,000 from USDA in a technology grant is even more significant. However, the chief said, looking at a server (which is a

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piece of computer hardware in this usage) is not very exciting.

The chief let everyone know that this program can be helpful to people served by police forces in Chiefland, Belleview, Dunnellon and elsewhere in Florida.

He also wanted to share the news that this group of federal employees are excellent to work with.

IN CONCLUSION

USDA Rural Development's Community Facilities programs provide loans and grants for essential community infrastructure, so that people who live and work in rural areas enjoy the same basic quality of life and services enjoyed by those in urban and metropolitan areas.

These funds can be used to construct, expand or improve facilities that provide health care, education, public safety and public services. Financing may cover the costs for land acquisition, professional fees and equipment purchases. These amenities help rural areas remain economically competitive, and help them attract and retain businesses that provide employment and services.

President Barack Obama's plan for rural America has brought about historic investment and resulted in stronger rural communities. Under the President's leadership, these investments in housing, community facilities, businesses and infrastructure have empowered rural America to continue leading the way – strengthening America's economy, small towns and rural communities.

USDA's investments in rural communities support the rural way of life that stands as the backbone of American values.