

Allentown police looking to recruit “homegrown” officers

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing March 29, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts in the wake of the George Floyd murder* 

*“I look for anyone that has a connection to Allentown.”
Allentown Police Chief Granitz*

So, once again, Gadfly’s keeping an eye out for what’s happening around us.

Allentown’s making an effort to recruit homegrown Latinx officers.

Allentown’s population is 50% Latinx, ours about 30%.

In Allentown, 30 of 216 officers are bilingual.

Gadfly doesn’t believe we know the racial/ethnic mix of our police department. He remembers Chief DiLuzio saying in one of the post-GeorgeFloyd discussions that all minorities were represented on the force (even Asian), but he does not remember that any numbers or percentages were given. The diversity in the department is another one of the areas Gadfly is hoping we would push on if we were to have the kind of Public Safety meeting he has wistfully wished for.

Several Council members have expressed the desire that the police force “look like” the population of the city.

A resident has suggested to Gadfly this prompt for the candidate forums: “Would you be willing to advocate for the development of a police force that has an equitable ratio of white males, white women, POC males, and POC women officers? Would you seek the same diversity-based composition for our local police union?”

Gadfly has several times heard mayoral candidate Grubb speak favorably of a time when a majority of City employees lived in Bethlehem.

Maybe you are catching Gadfly’s drift.

(Click [here](#) for the Hispanic Center virtual event led by Guillermo Lopez mentioned in the article below.)

selections from Paul Muschick, “Allentown police recruit more homegrown officers who speak Spanish. ‘It’s easier to build rapport with someone who can understand you’.” Morning Call, March 26, 2021

Allentown Police Officer Louis Santiago and his partner recently were called to a home where the kids were refusing to go to school.

Santiago, though a rookie, was suited to handle the situation.

He grew up on Allentown’s South Side. He attended one of the same schools, South Mountain Middle, as one of the children. He was able to make a connection with the youngster.

And he was able to connect with the children’s Spanish-speaking parents, because he spoke their language. He is one of 30 bilingual officers on the force of 216.

The city has been working harder recently to recruit its own, especially those who speak Spanish, to join the force. That’s a necessity, as a little more than half of Allentown’s residents are Hispanic. Cities nationwide are facing that same recruiting challenge.

“When I get there and I can explain to them in a language that they can understand, it kind of eases down the tension,” Santiago told me. “It’s easier to build rapport with someone who can understand you.”

He is one of a few Allentown natives who recently were hired. Another, Gregorio Mora, also speaks Spanish.

Officials are seeking officers who know Allentown, who know its people, who have an emotional investment in making life better for them.

“I look for anyone that has a connection to Allentown,” Police Chief Glenn Granitz Jr. said. “I’m looking for someone who grew up here, went to school here, maybe their mom or dad lives here. I’m looking for somebody that wants to move here.

“I have found there is a distinct connection between having that connection of some kind with the city and having that investment of wanting to see Allentown succeed,” said Granitz, who grew up in Allentown, joined the force in 2001 and became chief in 2019.

That’s not a knock against officers who grew up elsewhere. They make up the majority of the police force and serve Allentown well. But it’s important to have your own blood represented. Allentown hasn’t had as much as in the past, though it is making progress.

“Chief Granitz right now is probably making the best attempt I have seen towards trying to get the community to see that this is a career that’s good for everyone,” said Guillermo Lopez Jr.

Lopez is a Lehigh Valley Latino leader who has worked with police departments and other organizations locally and nationally to increase cultural awareness.

Lopez is co-director of the Law Enforcement and Community Trust Building Program at the National Coalition Building Institute, which provides training on diversity, equity and inclusion. He also owns a consulting firm. He has trained and consulted with more than 1,400 police officers.

On April 12, Lopez will be co-hosting a virtual event for the Hispanic Center Lehigh Valley, **“Trust Building with Law Enforcement.”** Granitz and police chiefs from Bethlehem, Easton, Nazareth and Lehigh University are scheduled to participate.

Lopez said having homegrown officers helps to build a police force that can communicate with and relate to the entire constituency it serves, and give all residents a sense that they will be treated fairly.