



Ansonia forum focuses on race relations and policing



ANSONIA - Valley residents and elected officials joined law enforcement representatives Wednesday night to start a conversation about race relations and policing.

The forum, hosted by the Valley NAACP, and Mayor David S. Cassetti and local police departments, drew about 60 people to the Joseph A. Doyle Senior Center. Resident Diane Stroman served as mistress of ceremonies.

"I'm grateful to the NAACP for encouraging this discussion," Cassetti said.

Valley NAACP President Greg Johnson said issues of race exist throughout society, such as racial profiling and Tasing.

"Today is a meeting of the minds," he said. "(With this forum) I wanted us to be proactive. Hopefully we can move forward."

Seymour Police Chief Michael Metzler talked about a recent conference on 21st-Century policing he and Derby Police Chief Gerald Narowski attended in Washington, D.C.

Metzler said Seymour Police Department offers a Citizens Academy and Youth Academy to outreach to the community.

Narowski said his department's "community relations are pretty good," but acknowledged they could improve. He said chiefs learned at the conference to "integrate more minorities" into their departments.

Ansonia Police Chief Kevin Hale said he and officers have started holding forums with high school students to improve relations with them.



Narowski said it's difficult to find applicants. "Nobody wants to be a police officer today," he said.

Shelton Interim Police Chief Shawn Sequeira said police need to recognize some individuals have "a lot of issues due to being medicated. Officers need to try to understand a diagnosis," he said. "Even though we are people we are held to a higher standard."

Hale said he and Ansonia Police Commissioner Bruce Goldson had "embarked on a drive to get minorities to apply," by visiting public places such as churches but didn't have much luck. "What can we all do to increase the number of minority recruits?" Hale asked.

Valley Community Foundation President Sharon Closius said Valley municipalities should consider joining together to form a regional PAL program to make it easier to secure grants.

U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal stopped in on a surprise visit and commended the community conversation initiative.

"I've fought for training and equipment and resources, which is important, and so is leadership like what is in this room," he said. "I'm tremendously proud of Valley people. Congratulations on the great job you're doing here."

State Sen. Joseph J. Crisco, D-Woodbridge, and state Rep. Linda M. Gentile, D-Ansonia, said they would help to get funding for a PAL program.

Alderman Frank DeLibero suggested the police "go to the elementary school level (to meet with students). Kids look up to authority."



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