Analyst officer takes a byte out of crime

By Dan Holtz Leader-Telegram staff | Posted: Sunday, February 17, 2013 12:00 am

Chris Jaeger doesn't wear a badge or carry a gun.

He is also not a sworn officer, meaning he cannot make arrests.

But if you ask Jaeger's supervisors at the Eau Claire Police Department, his work is crucial for patrol officers and detectives to do their jobs more effectively.

Jaeger is the Police Department's crime analyst. His tool of the trade is primarily a computer.

His position "is part of our overall strategy to provide research- and evidence-based policing on the street," Eau Claire Police Chief Jerry Matysik said.

Jaeger provides objective data the department's officers can rely upon to make decisions. He puts the city's crime data into easily understandable maps and charts, "which helps us understand what's driving crime and where it's located," Matysik said.

"If we're going to have limited resources, then having a crime analyst in place helps us allocate those resources in the right spots," he said.

Lt. Matt Rokus, a supervisor in the detective division, said Jaeger's work as a crime analyst is very valuable.

Detectives focus not only on solving crimes, but also on addressing and preventing crime trends. The crime analyst helps identify trends and links between individuals, Rokus said.

"In the past investigators had to do more research and report reading to accurately identify a trend or a pattern," he said. "Now they can use the time they normally would have spent poring through reports doing investigative work."

Deputy Chief Chad Hoyord, who oversees the department's patrol division, explained patrol officers are divided into three districts throughout the city and each district has six beats.

With 18 beat areas in the city, Jaeger identifies areas with potential crime, quality of life or traffic issues. "He just gives us a better opportunity to evaluate what's going on," Hoyord said.

For example, Jaeger's data analysis helps officers determine whether certain traffic crashes are related to specific intersections and if more traffic enforcement is needed in certain areas of the city, he said.

"(Jaeger) allows us to take a wider look at things," Hoyord said. "He has saved us a ton of time. His work allows us to do our job more accurately and quicker."

Eau Claire police hired its first crime analyst in 2008. Jaeger joined the department in April 2011.

Jaeger, 25, earned his bachelor's degree in criminology and law studies from Marquette University and received a graduate certificate from UW-Milwaukee in geographic information systems.

He provides frequent reports to officers and takes raw data and turns it into charts and maps. He frequently puts out bulletins to officers if he spots a trend.

Last year Jaeger discovered a series of open and unlocked garages in Eau Claire that were entered into, and that there wasn't a certain type of tool or equipment that was targeted.

But he also discovered that graffiti was a common factor in these cases and the crimes were centered in a small geographic area of the city. He also tracked the specific times of the day the crimes occurred.

"I am more geared to find out that information. I put out a two-page bulletin. It was a snapshot of what was going on so officers could recognize that activity," Jaeger said.

His analytical mind gears itself perfectly to his job, he said.

"I get to do research projects every day. It's engaging. You're scanning for issues," he said.

"I think of it as a puzzle. It's fun having an opportunity to work on changing issues. I get to work with all members of the department, and being able to interact departmentwide is enjoyable as well."

Jaeger also prepares reports that police forward to the Eau Claire County district attorney's office for prosecution. "I get to be part of all these working parts," he said.

The crime analyst position also changed how officers are scheduled, said Kyle Roder, the Police Department's community relations officer.

In the past, the department divided officers into three separate eight-hour day, evening and overnight shifts to cover each 24-hour period.

With the aid of the crime analyst to determine when the most activity occurred, the department developed overlapping shifts to better address the workload at various times of the day, Roder said.

"At six o'clock in the morning we don't need as many officers as we do at five o'clock at night," he said.

Having a crime analyst helps the Police Department rely on data "instead of anecdotes and what we feel is happening," Matysik said.

"We want to be proactive instead of reactive and implement solutions. We try to get to the underlying issue and what's driving that," he said.

"We can identify the problem and get to the heart of the issue to interrupt the crime trend rather than let it run its course and create more victims."

With the exception of 1999, total crimes committed in Eau Claire in seven out of the past eight years are the lowest they've been since 1979.

The FBI's uniform crime reporting standards recognize eight categories of offenses that reflect the most serious crimes: homicide, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, theft, motor vehicle theft and arson.

The fact that most of those reduced-crime years have come since the Police Department gained a crime analyst is not a coincidence, Matysik said.

"That's not just happenstance. There are several factors involved, but I am a firm believer police can play a significant role in reducing crime in a community," he said.

"The crime analyst is part of the department's move toward research-based strategies. I believe the success of those efforts are reflected in the annual numbers."

Jaeger also can update officers as to the individuals who generate the most police contact in the city for both criminal and noncriminal issues, Matysik said.

"A fairly small number of people generate a lot of our activity," he said. "Without having a crime analyst to look at the data, it's really hard to intervene."

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Pinpointing Trends

October was a relatively busy month for the Eau Claire Police Department. Following are some of the high-profile criminal acts that occurred that month:

n Christian A.N. Peterson was shot and killed by an Eau Claire police officer who confronted Peterson as he attempted to get inside an occupied pickup truck stopped at the drive-through window at a Brackett Avenue restaurant. Peterson had led police on a high-speed chase during which he stole a vehicle at gunpoint.

n Shane L. Gregory, who had eluded police for five days since leading them on two chases in Chippewa and Eau Claire counties, eventually was arrested in Chippewa County.

n Doua Vang was charged with first-degree intentional homicide after he was accused of fatally stabbing Bobbie Vue, 17, after Vue and several others invaded a party at Vang's Eau Claire residence and began fighting.

To ease any public alarm, Matysik in October directed Jaeger to show that overall crime was not on the rise in Eau Claire.

"There was a spike that month, but for those of us who are close to that information, we knew (overall) crime was not up," Matysik said.

Eau Claire Police Department crime analyst Chris Jaeger uses a computer to help police do investigative work. With Jaeger's help, officers no longer have to pore through volumes of police reports to tally up information and develop a trend, said Deputy Chief Chad Hoyord.

Staff photoby Shane Opatz