



www.yarmouthpolice.com/dypd

NOTICE: This is an archived item from the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School Police Services Office website. Keep in mind that the law changes frequently with legislative changes and each new court decision handed down at both the state and federal level. Police procedures are modified to satisfy those changes. This article may be out of date with current practices.

Careers in Law Enforcement A Guide To The Basics

Provided by the

Yarmouth Police Department

through the

Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School

Police Services Office

©1996

There are nearly 800,000 police officers in the United States and over one hundred fifty law enforcement agencies in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts alone. Law enforcement is a very competitive field. This guide is meant to answer only the most basic of questions and to get you going in the right direction.

WHAT ARE YOU GETTING YOURSELF INTO?

The Yarmouth Police Department has over fifty-five sworn police officers, ten civilian employees including a mechanic, clerical staff, and public safety telecommunicators, two K-9s, and over twenty reserve police officers. We operate 30 vehicles and five bicycles. Our operating budget is 4 million dollars a year. We serve a community of 26,000 year-round residents plus as many as 60,000 visitors at the height of the tourist season. The Yarmouth Police Department is a community oriented agency and we truly are "*Committed To Our Community*".

Many new recruits are surprised to find out that law enforcement is not all catching the bad guys. Police work is a service-oriented people business. The Yarmouth Police Department handles around 30,000 calls for service a year. We handle a wide range of situations, from bank robberies and domestic disturbances to giving directions to lost tourists and providing information at neighborhood meetings. Most of those calls were service activities as opposed to law enforcement calls. The Yarmouth Police Department, like many other agencies, runs a Citizen Police Academy. This intensive program provides the student with a tremendous amount of information about what police work is really like and can be an excellent resource to those considering law enforcement as

their career field.

HOW DO I GET A JOB IN LAW ENFORCEMENT?

Watch the newspapers! Most agencies must advertise when they begin their hiring process. If you do not know when they are hiring, then you cannot apply. Every law enforcement agency has its own hiring process, but many of the elements are generally the same. Here is the hiring process of the Yarmouth Police Department as a typical example. Only applicants who pass each stage move on to the next:

- An ad for applicants is placed in various newspapers.
- A general-knowledge written test is administered.
- Background investigations are conducted on applicants who meet or exceed a set cut-off score.
- Those applicants are then interviewed by a board of senior Yarmouth Police Officers. Some applicants will be eliminated based upon their interview.
- A smaller number of applicants are then interviewed by a representative from the office of the Chief of Police and from the Town Administrator's Office (usually the Chief and Town Administrator themselves)
- A list is formed and each applicant has a specific ranking on that list.
- As openings come up, a conditional offer of employment is extended to the person ranked number one on the list.
- Applicants are given a psychological screening to ensure they have the appropriate disposition for police work. A physical screening is also conducted to ensure an applicant is physically capable of doing the job.
- A physical ability test (PAT) is held that, by law, each candidate must pass in order to be hired as a police officer in the Commonwealth. The PAT standards are set by the Massachusetts Human Resources Division and the test is conducted by their personnel. Applicants must also meet the criteria for acceptance to the academy as set by the Municipal Police Training Committee.

Applicants passing all phases and accepting the job are appointed as police officers by the Honorable Board of Selectmen. Unless they are already academy trained, new hires are given a date on which they begin the six months of police academy training.

This process is typical for an agency about the size of the Yarmouth Police Department. The process will vary from agency to agency. A very large number of law enforcement agencies in Massachusetts, including some on Cape Cod, subscribe to the Civil Service Commission. Civil Service is a division of the Commonwealth's Human Resources Division. They administer a written general-knowledge test about every two years for all their subscribers. Applicants are required to list several agencies that they are interested in working for. A list of the applicants interested in a specific agency and their scores is generated and submitted to that agency by Civil Service for their consideration. Those scoring highest on the written test move forward in the hiring process of the individual agency.

MAKE YOURSELF MARKETABLE

Law enforcement is generally a buyer's market. In other words, there are more applicants than there are jobs. Most agencies have the luxury of picking and choosing whom they want. Making yourself marketable is crucial.

COLLEGE EDUCATION

While some agencies do not require a college degree, almost all prefer a minimum of an Associates Degree. Degrees in Criminal Justice or similar fields are preferred.

EXPERIENCE

Applicants who come to the job with some type of experience are very attractive. Many agencies have some type of reserve, auxiliary, or cadet program where prospective police officers can get their feet wet and gain valuable experience and training. The armed forces also offer excellent training and experience in their Military Police Schools, both on active duty and in the reserves.

POLICE ACADEMY TRAINING

Applicants who are graduates of a Municipal Police Training Committee approved police academy are very desirable. The hiring police department can put the academy trained applicant to work immediately and not wait the normal four month training lag between hiring and active duty. Most applicants who are already academy trained are coming from other police departments where they have had the opportunity to get some experience under their belt. A few others are sponsored by a police department. These people are few and far between because they must commit to the rigors of four months of training without pay. They are also responsible for providing their own uniforms, equipment, and health insurance. Not many agencies participate in sponsorship.

CRIMINAL RECORD

You must keep your nose clean. Even the smallest infraction on your record can keep you from getting a job. Many state and federal laws carry a prohibition from carrying a firearm upon conviction. In minor cases where no prohibition exists the impact can still be significant. Think of it this way: if it came down to someone with a "minor in possession of alcohol" charge on their record, or the next person whose record is clean, who would you pick to be a police officer?

PART-TIME OPPORTUNITIES

Many cities and towns including those on the Cape & Islands have part-time police officers. Reserve, special, or auxiliary police officers are used to increase manpower to meet the needs of the seasonal population increases, and during special or major police deployments. The Yarmouth Police Department has a moderate number of reservists on our roster. The hiring process resembles our regular hiring process very closely and it is very competitive. A background investigation is conducted on all new hires. Those hired must complete the Reserve-Intermittent Academy training course approved by the Municipal Police Training

Committee. This program offers prospective police officers a taste of the real thing and provides them with some very valuable training and experience.

FULL-TIME OPPORTUNITIES

MUNICIPAL (LOCAL)

Municipal government is the home of the bulk of police employment opportunities. The average police agency in the United States is comprised of fifty sworn police officers or fewer. Agencies like the Yarmouth Police Department comprise the vast majority of law enforcement jobs in the United States. The serious candidate should consider going where the work is. Once he or she has earned some experience in the field it is easier to shop for a preferred location or agency as an attractive candidate. There are fifteen local police departments on Cape Cod.

COUNTY

Sheriff's departments in Massachusetts, like the Barnstable County Sheriff's Office are primarily responsible for corrections and not law enforcement, though some have a small staff of criminal investigators whose role is to provide forensic and photographic support to local police departments and act as clearing houses for information such as fingerprints. In other parts of America, the Sheriff's Department is the local law enforcement agency, and they cover a wide area. Each sheriff's department has their own hiring process.

CAMPUS LAW ENFORCEMENT

Most large colleges and universities maintain a private police force on campus. In many cases these officers are granted their arrest powers by the local or state government where the campus is located. These officers receive their basic academy and in-service training alongside municipal police officers at state accredited training centers. Campus Police agencies such as the Boston College Police, Northeastern University Police, and the University of Massachusetts Police (Amherst) offer tremendous career opportunities and excellent benefits packages.

STATE

The Massachusetts State Police is a large agency that offers a diverse range of specialty units from ballistics to aviation. The State Police hold their own civil service style test when they have a need to hire new troopers. The state also operates other agencies such as the Environmental Police, and the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) Transit Police. Some of these agencies are Civil Service subscribers.

OPPORTUNITIES AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

The federal government has a large number of law enforcement agencies, usually with small staffs. Almost every federal agency has some law enforcement branch within it. These agencies have a wide

range of jurisdictions and specialties to choose from. Most train new recruits at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. Each has its own extensive hiring process. This is just a partial list.

Department of Justice

- Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms

 - Drug Enforcement Administration

 - Federal Bureau of Investigation

 - FBI Police

 - United States Marshals Service

Department of Homeland Security

- Customs & Boarder Protection

 - Transportation Security Administration

 - United States Border Patrol

 - United States Coast Guard

 - United States Secret Service

Department of the Treasury

- U.S. Mint Police

United States Postal Service

- U.S. Postal Inspection Service (*the oldest law enforcement agency in the United States*)

Other federal departments that have one or more law enforcement agencies under their auspice:

- Department of Defense

- Department of the Interior

 - United States Park Police

- Environmental Protection Agency

- United States Congress

 - United States Capitol Police

MILITARY LAW ENFORCEMENT

Each branch of the armed forces is served by its own law enforcement agency. The Army and Marine Corps have the Military Police; the Air Force has Security Police; the Navy, Master at Arms. Each branch has battlefield obligations on top of its law enforcement responsibility. They are each charged with security, force protection, and law enforcement on military installations at home and abroad. Serious crimes are investigated by the Army's Criminal Investigation Command (C.I.D.), and the Air Force Office of Special Investigation (O.S.I.). The Navy and Marine Corps fall under the jurisdiction of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (N.C.I.S.). C.I.D. and O.S.I. do not take direct enlistments. You must serve in the respective branch for a period of time before being considered.

N.C.I.S. is actually a civilian branch of the Navy and hires personnel in much the same way other federal law enforcement agencies do. The United States Coast Guard, a division of the Department of Homeland Security, is responsible for enforcing criminal as well as environmental and maritime law on the high seas. All offer excellent training, opportunities and assignments all over the world. The M.P.s and S.P.s offer excellent training for prospective civilian police officers and can be a good starting point for young people who do not choose the college route.

MORE QUESTIONS?

Remember, this guide is just meant to give you basic information. The U.S Department of Labor also has information in its on-line Occupational Outlook Handbook on pursuing a Police & Detectives career. If you are seriously considering a career in law enforcement at any level, please do not hesitate to stop by the D-Y Police Services Office to get more information, or if you are reading this on the internet contact your local police department or any of the other agencies mentioned here.

CAREERS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

A Guide To The Basics

Written by

Officer Nicholas R. Pasquarosa, Jr.

School Resource Officer

Provided by The

Yarmouth Police Department

Peter L. Carnes, Chief of Police

through the

Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School

Police Services Office

“Committed To Our Community”

© 1996-2007 Nicholas R. Pasquarosa, Jr.