

Public safety candidates go public

Making their pitches

By Dan Nienaber and Dan Linehan

dniehaber@mankatofreepress.com dlinehan@mankatofreepress.com

MANKATO — Four candidates hoping to become Mankato's next public safety director had a chance to tout their leadership strengths in a public setting Thursday.

After participating in a four-hour tour of Mankato and its public safety facilities, the candidates faced a panel of community representatives to explain why they should be the next public safety director. They each gave a 15-minute presentation before taking questions from the mayor, three councilmen and five other panelists.

Building relationships in the community, as well as a stronger bridge between the department's police officers and firefighters, were common themes during the only public portion of the candidates' two-day visit to Mankato. About 20 other people, most with direct ties to area law enforcement, also attended the meeting.

When Mayor John Brady asked the first two candidates a question about how long they hoped to stay in Mankato, both said they saw the opportunity as a chance to make changes and build new leaders within the department before moving on or retiring. Neither described how long they thought that process would take.

"I'm hoping to have people succeed me," said James Coan, who is the police chief in Whitewater, Wis. "It's not so much how long I would be here, but that you would have people in place to take over for me when I'm done."

In response to the same question, Owatonna Police Chief Shaun LaDue said he had no desire to match the long law enforcement career of Jerry Huettl, Mankato's public safety director who is retiring at the end of March.

"I have to be challenged," LaDue said. "My next move, whether it's here or somewhere else, will be my last in law enforcement."

Please see FORUM, Page [A5](#)



Photos by Pat Christman

James Coan, police chief in Whitewater, Wis., is one of four public safety director candidates visiting Mankato for public and city staff interviews Thursday and today.



Katie Nerem, assistant Blue Earth County administrator, was one of five public panelists who participated in presentations by four candidates hoping to fill Mankato's director of public safety position.

[See FORUM on Page A05](#)

FORUM: Selection may be made as soon as next week

Continued from Page A1

LaDue added to that when Council President Mike Laven asked him to explain why he wanted to make the move to Mankato. He said he wanted to build a team of leaders, lift the department to a "higher level," then let a new leader take over at the right time.

"I was hired in Owatonna to be a change agent," he said. "That's what I did.

Now my job is almost over there."

The five panelists chosen to represent the community were Bukata Hayes, Greater Mankato Diversity Council executive director; Katie Nerem, assistant Blue Earth County administrator; Sheri Allen, superintendent of Mankato Area Public Schools; Jonathan Zierdt, Greater Mankato Growth president and executive director; and Suzie Dugan, Minnesota State University director of security.

Each asked a question about how the candidates would build relationships between public safety and the people they represent.

Todd Miller, a former chief of police for 32 years in Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Texas, was asked by Brady, in view of his expansive resume, how long he planned to stay in Mankato.

He replied that he wants to spend his final eight to 10 years in law enforcement in one place.

"This would be the pinnacle of my career," he said.

Miller emphasized his support for community policing, a philosophy that emphasizes good community relationships and attention to livability issues, not just catching criminals.

He also promised to nurture respect and transparency so his officers and firefighters get protected when they're in the right and citizens can approach him if they think a mistake was made.

The final presenter, Anthony Paetznick, is the deputy fire chief of New Brighton.

Like Miller, he stressed the shared public safety responsibility between the citizenry and law enforcement.

He was a union steward but said he was "accused of thinking too much like management."

Paetznick said there are really no new ideas left in law enforcement. An effective leader finds existing tactics and strategies and adapts them to his or her department, he said.

Mankato City Manager Pat Hentges will choose the next director. He said he'd make his choice as early as next week.

Powered by [TECNAVIA](#)

Copyright 2010 Mankato Free Press