

Profiles in Excellence: Brooklyn Park Police Chief Michael Davis

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
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For it to ever be a second, there has to be a first.

In Brooklyn Park, Michael Davis is that first ... pardon; that is Chief Michael Davis. In 2008 Davis became the first African-American to be named chief of the Brooklyn Park Police Department. Based on the longevity of the past chiefs, Davis could be there for a while. He is only the fourth chief in the city's 56-year history.

Davis, a native of St. Paul's Midway neighborhood, came to Brooklyn Park after committing 16 years to the Minneapolis Police Department, starting as a patrolman and ascending to the rank of sector lieutenant. The graduate of St. Paul's St. Agnes High School and Concordia University – holding a master's in organizational management – said when he was selected chief, race played little role.

"When the city manager hired me he said he believed he hired the best person for the job," said Davis.

But Davis does recognize the significance of his hire. He is just one of three African-American police chiefs in the entire state – St. Paul's Tom Smith is one and St. Cloud's William Blair Anderson is the other.

"I think for Minnesota that's (being an African-American police chief) huge. When you go to other parts of the country being an African-American chief is no big deal, but here it shows progress," said Davis. "It's encouraging."

Brooklyn Park is the second most diverse city in the state, with a 48 percent non-white population. That is a drastic demographic shift from 20 years ago when its non-white population was just 10 percent.

"The diversity in the city presents a tremendous opportunity to bring people together and do great things," said Davis.

Diversity is something of which Davis is very proud. He was a part of the most diverse graduating class in the Minneapolis Police Academy's history. In addition to being African-American, Davis is part Native-American and his wife is Native-American as well.

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Davis said he was drawn to law enforcement because he witnessed an increase in crime in his Midway neighborhood and he wanted to do something to make a difference.

“There’s a lot of suffering that goes on with crime. Crime is not just a statistic, and we know crime disproportionately affects African-Americans,” said Davis, who said he is ever committed to bettering the lives of others. “This job forever changes your world view. You see the worst people have to offer, but you also see the best.”

For the 42-year-old Davis, he believes the best approach to keeping the community safe is getting involved in people’s lives before the police are needed.

“It’s about being proactive. There has to be a relationship of trust between the police and the community,” said Davis, who said his department created a youth violence prevention center in 2009 with programs in football, fishing and even cooking to engage Brooklyn Park children. “It’s about connecting and about creating opportunities for kids to interact with officers.”

Davis said he has three perpetual goals for the department, which has a staff of 150. Those goals are to reduce crime, reduce the fear of crime and to increase community involvement.

“At the end of the day what drives me is trying to bring about a positive change in behavior in the community,” said Davis. “With the advent of the 911 system, we’ve created a dependant culture; there’s not that connectivity. If you have connectivity you reduce that need for law enforcement in such a way. A community thrives when people take ownership. We have a community of abundance in Brooklyn Park.”