

**SOUTH DAKOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
LIFELINE/TRIBAL LINK UP ADVERTISING/OUTREACH
ANNUAL REPORT
JULY 1, 2021**

Company:

Address:
Sikeston, MO 63801

Telephone number:

Company contact:

Study Area Code:

Lifeline/Tribal Link Up Advertising/Outreach Activities:



Advertise in media of general distribution.* (See attached advertisement(s).)



Letter to existing and new customers regarding the availability of Lifeline/Tribal Link Up within 1st 30 days of service.* (See invoice)

Company's Lifeline/Tribal Link Up information in directory.



Company's Lifeline/Tribal Link Up information available on Company website. <https://www.vastbroadband.com/lifeline-assistance/>



Company's information posted on USAC website.

Other (describe):

*Required

Diversity

Continued from Page 1A

The Sioux Falls Police Department faces challenges to address its broken relationship and perception among black and minority residents, especially communication with those communities and a lack of representation on the police force.

"We need to be doing more than just not doing things wrong," said Hariri, co-founder of a Sioux Falls-based consulting firm that specializes in leadership development.

Protesters believe they have solutions. Now, they're asking city and police officials to listen.

Running out of options

To be a black man is to be an assumed criminal in Sioux Falls, said Hariri, a Lincoln High School graduate who lived in Buffalo, N.Y., before moving to South Dakota.

Whether he's in his own home or with his friends, he said he has been pushed around by Sioux Falls law enforcement; his identity questioned, and his rights stripped. That's normal for a black man, he said.

The 39-year-old can remember a night about a decade ago when he and his friends were approached by a SFPD officer. The officer instructed the men to come to his vehicle and told them to place their hands on the hood of his patrol car. He didn't explain why, indicate if they were being detained or justify his actions.

As Hariri stood there, he didn't question the officer or raise his voice. He feared standing up for his rights would escalate the situation. Eventually, he and his friends were let go without any charges.

"You're treated as if you're a crime waiting to happen," he said.

Sioux Falls police chief Matt Burns counters that some interventions are necessary for police officers' safety based on the situation. Even then, he wants people to report those instances if they feel they're treated unfairly by police.

There were 39 complaints against SFPD officers in 2019. Nineteen of them alleged officers of assault or excessive force, and seven of them alleged officers of arrogance or disrespectful comments. All complaints were determined unfounded or not sustained by an internal review by SFPD supervisors, according to the city's website.

"Based upon the reporting I've been given and the complaints that come into our department, I don't believe we have a pervasive problem (of racial discrimination in SFPD)," said Burns, who was named police chief in 2015. "But if there are persons that don't feel like they can talk and speak up about that, then that's something we have to work on. Let's hear from you. Tell us your concerns, please. We want to hear that."

From a national perspective, video of a Minneapolis police officer kneeling on Floyd's neck as he repeated that he couldn't breathe was a tipping point for those who think the conversation hasn't progressed quickly enough. Organizers of demonstrations, including those in Sioux Falls, hope stronger protest will trigger actual change in their communities.

"The question is why are the protests necessary?" said Hariri. "That gives context to why rioting is an option. These things become necessary because talking doesn't work, pleading doesn't work, praying doesn't work, hoping doesn't work — this is just people running through more options."

Diversity remains elusive

Julian Beaudion's voice shook as he spoke to thousands of protesters filling Van Een Park in downtown Sioux Falls last Sunday evening. He paused, gathering himself and his emotions as he



South Dakota Highway Patrol Trooper Julian Beaudion inspects the Zor Mavericks group from Wautoma, Wisconsin, during competition at the Midwest Shrine Association Convention at the W.H. Lyons Fairgrounds Friday morning. **COM MVERS**



Sioux Falls police chief Matt Burns, right, has a stated goal to build a force that reflects the city's population. But progress toward that goal has been slow. **JOE AHLQUIST / ARGUS LEADER**

pleaded for justice and peace in the center of the crowd.

Then, hours later, Beaudion was on the opposite front line, sorting through the destruction of protesters hurling rocks at officers and store windows near the Empire Mall after the official protest was over.

Beaudion is one of a handful of black law enforcement officers in South Dakota, serving as a state trooper with the South Dakota Highway Patrol. He also was a candidate in this week's Sioux Falls City Council race, falling to incumbent Greg Neitzert in the Northwest District. It wasn't the potential of facing a riot that Beaudion feared though as he spoke at the protest. It was the possibility of being ostracized by his own officers for speaking out against police brutality.

"But every time I take this uniform off, I am still a black man," he said. "I had to give that speech not just for my community but for my family. It was necessary for the city. The black community sometimes can see a black officer or man in uniform and immediately think we don't have their back. I needed to show the community that I not only have their back, but I will fight for and risk everything for that community I am part of."

Burns, like those who served as police chief before him, has a stated goal to build a force that reflects the city's population, though the numbers have remained relatively stagnant during his tenure. That lack of racial representation could lead to troubling situations,

protesters say.

The Sioux Falls Police Department has just one black officer. That doesn't include officers who list their race as "two or more races," according to the city's human resource office. While the Sioux Falls population of over 190,000 is comprised of nearly 20% minorities, SFPD is about 91% white.

In comparison, the Sioux Falls population is 6% black, according to an estimate from the U.S. Census Bureau. Statistically, the department would need 14 black officers to reflect the city's population.

Burns recently set a goal for his department to have at least 20% of each training class be racially diverse officers. But recruitment efforts don't always lead to a spike in diversity numbers, said Burns, who pointed to a need to hire the best applicants regardless of race.

An increasingly competitive job market has left applicant numbers down for several years, Burns said. The department is already short 13 officers to have "authorized strength" and sufficient coverage of the Sioux Falls population.

To address this, the department has increased its presence at job fairs, universities and recruiting forums — and now Burns wants to cast the department's recruiting net to cities and states from outside the Midwest to reach more diverse communities.

But at the end of the day, law enforcement officials insist that they're looking for the best possible candidate rather than focusing solely on statistics.

Calling for action

Protest organizers met with city leaders last Sunday before the demonstration took place in Sioux Falls. Burns also met with minority leaders through the SFPD community ambassador program Wednesday to hear their concerns.

What he's learned is that SFPD needs more communication about what steps are needed to better reflect and serve black and minority communities, he said.

Although SFPD has a low complaint rate among its officers — and Burns believes that's because his officers are doing their jobs correctly — he wants to hear about instances of racism or when people feel they are treated disrespectfully.

Between Burns, Beaudion and Hariri, all agreed that communication is the first step.

"We want to merge together so we don't just leave this at a conversation level," Beaudion said. "We want to make sure there's action behind this."

An emphasis on minority staffing isn't the only way to address racial justice issues. Burns said SFPD is reviewing its policies and use of force in light of the national conversation surrounding police brutality, adding that officers were already trained to avoid use of force in the neck or spine area.

On Friday, the city of Minneapolis agreed with the state to ban the use of chokeholds by police and to require police to report and intervene anytime they see an unauthorized use of force by another officer. Other cities are reviewing policies as well.

"We will treat everyone fairly, and we will not tolerate anyone in our department, or frankly in our city, that has a contrary opinion or action," Burns said of the SFPD's efforts. "It has to be that way. It must be that way. And we will ensure it is."

The SFPD provides annual diversity training, which covers racial and ethnic bias, as well as gender, sexual orientation, religion and socioeconomic.

Beaudion said he plans to meet with minority leaders in the coming weeks to create a list of "actionable items," including lesson plans for SFPD diversity training more specific to Sioux Falls' needs and policy change suggestions.

"This is just the beginning," Beaudion said. "We want to make sure we provide a platform for everybody so that it works for everyone in our community and not just a certain group."

See DIVERSITY, Page 6A

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