Grant funds new cars, cameras for police

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By Freda R. Savana Staff Writer

The police department is buying 12 new in-car video camera systems that will allow better tracking of crimes. They’re replacing vehicles too.

The Montgomery Township Police Department is beefing things up with five new vehicles, 12 in-car video camera systems and the training of a new K-9 officer.

Township Manager Larry Gregan said the state-of-the-art cameras will be paid for with a $75,000 grant. The new patrol vehicles, which include four Ford Crown Victorias and one Ford Expedition, will cost the township $120,000.

Police Chief Richard J. Brady said the cameras, mounted on the front of marked cruisers, can record everything an officer sees and hears from when a crime is first observed until the incident is resolved. A second camera, inside the car, records suspects while they are in the back seat.

"The camera can follow a drunk driver from the initial violation, through the field sobriety test to the arrest," said Brady. "It eliminates a lot of liability issues."

The video, stored on a separate computer system, is automatically downloaded onto a hard drive, the chief said.

Three of the department’s vehicles have had the cameras for several years and Brady said they are “absolutely” worth the cost. The older cameras will be replaced when the new cameras arrive.

With the purchase of the new vehicles this year, part of an annual rotation, Brady said, the township will only have to replace two in its fleet of 19 vehicles in 2012.

He also noted that Ford is phasing out the Crown Victoria and in time the department will have to switch to a different model, which can be costly.

"It’s very expensive to change models," said Brady, because it means each car needs new light bars, radio consoles and other equipment. "Those are major expenses."

By buying new vehicles now, that expense can be delayed, he added.
The police department is also investing in a third police dog and training a patrolman to be the animal's officer partner.

Officer Daniel Rose will be attending a four-week program in North Carolina in May, where he'll learn the special skills needed to work with a highly trained animal. The total cost is about $12,000.

"It's very time-consuming and requires a lot of dedication," said Brady, of being part of a K-9 unit. The officer takes full responsibility for the animal.

The expense will be defrayed by the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office, which gets all money the township police department seizes during crimes. Those funds are then returned to police for support of their K-9 units and other programs, said the chief.

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