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WPD Welcomes Two Employees to New Victims Advocacy Program

The Wheeling Police Department launched its new Crime Advocacy Program this month and welcomed two new employees who will help victims of crimes – all thanks to grant money provided by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Victims of Crime.

Brenda Steiniger and Emily Wizba, both of Wheeling started in their new role's March 2. Steinger will serve as Victim Coordinator, while Wizba will be a Victim Specialist.

"We're ready to work together with multiple local agencies," said Steiniger. "We will be here through every step of the healing process. Just know that help is available for crime victims."

Steiniger has been involved helping people most of her professional career. After graduating from West Liberty University with a degree in communications, she obtained her master's degree in human services from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va. She spent 18 years working for the Sexual Assault Help Center in Wheeling, as well as Habitat for Humanity, where she served as Executive Director. She also is a Family Court Mediator.

Wizba, a graduate of West Virginia University with a master's degree in counseling and an undergraduate in psychology is eager to get to work. She recently worked as a trauma liaison for Crittenton Services in Wheeling. She hopes to use her counseling skills by applying her knowledge by helping victims.

"My hope, along with Brenda is to craft this program in a way that will truly benefit the City of Wheeling," said Wizba. "There is healing for every victim. It's a passion we both have, and already, we've been put to work."

The program, still in development, will help any person who becomes a victim of a crime. The advocates will be the first line for contact for any victim and will work to consistently stay in direct contact, so they are not left behind. Both Steiniger and Wizba will together work with several local agencies who offer similar services.

"It is nice to see initiatives identified through the strategic planning process come to fruition," said Chief Shawn Schwertfeger. "Now that we have staffed the positions, I am excited to see the benefits of providing additional services to crime victims and the continued development of the WPD as a model law enforcement agency in the region and state."

"I could not be happier with the selection of Brenda and Emily. Both are highly educated and have already developed an excellent working relationship and brought great energy to what we are trying to accomplish. After one week of work, I have observed all our core values in each of them. I believe victim advocacy needs a renewed focus and this program will enhance our

service delivery and at the end of the day, make our department a much more professional and efficient one,” said the Chief.

The Wheeling Police Department is one of 34 departments that received grant funding in late 2019. WPD was awarded \$272,000 to operate the office through 2023. An advisory committee is currently being established to monitor the program’s success.

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