

Fewer take police test

But minority applicants up for Suffolk exam

BY RICK BRAND
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The civil service test to hire new Suffolk County police officers has drawn 19,833 applicants, the fewest in 16 years due to the strong economy, but also has spurred a strong response from minority applicants.

Suffolk Police Commissioner Geraldine Hart called recruitment efforts, which included more than 180 events, “a resounding success” at a time when other departments nationwide are seeing “significant decreases in applicants.”

Department officials said 6,757 of the 7,628 test applicants who provided their ethnic background stated they were not Caucasian. Hart said that indicates at least 34 percent of all 19,833 applicants will be minorities.

The competitive test, given every four years, had 20,667 applicants in 2015. In 2011, when the unemployment rate was 8.4 percent, 31,039 applied, while 28,776 signed up in 2007. The last year the number dropped below this year’s was 2003, when 18,829 people took the test.

To increase participation, Suffolk County Executive Steve Bel-

lone extended the original April 3 application deadline by two weeks, as only 18,372 people had signed up to take the test.

Jason Elan, Bellone’s spokesman, said Suffolk is feeling the effects of a 4 percent unemployment rate. He also noted that job seekers in 2015 had four extra months to apply.

“Even while competing with a strong economy and record low unemployment, we are pleased 20,000 individuals have signed up,” Elan said.

The police test, scheduled for June 15, comes as county police unions are without a contract after the expiration on Dec. 31 of an eight-year pact that created a two-tier pay system for new officers and those already on the job.

Starting pay for new police officers is \$42,000 a year, with the salary reaching \$111,518 after 12 years. The Suffolk County Legislature’s office of

budget review estimated average pay for Suffolk police officers last year at \$138,346 including overtime, night differential and other benefits.

Noel DiGerolamo, president of the Suffolk Police Benevolent Association, said he saw no connection between the contract situation and test turnout.

“In times of low unemployment, less people apply across the board for civil service jobs — it’s cyclical,” DiGerolamo said. “We’ve seen it before and well see it again.”

DiGerolamo said the county test “attracts the best qualified and only the best qualified are hired.”

Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory (D-Copiague) said the smaller applicant pool this year, and the increase in the number of minority applicants, “may be a benefit in that it may give people a feeling they have better chance to get on the department. In the past some people used to say it seemed easier to get into Harvard than the police department.”

Legis. Robert Trotta (R-Fort Salonga), a retired police detective, attributed the overall drop in applicants to young people leaving Suffolk.

“There’s no kids left here anymore,” said Trotta. “That age group is fleeing Long Island.”

To recruit minorities, the county conducted a \$215,000 marketing campaign aimed at

attracting a more diverse field of job seekers.

Suffolk County has been under a consent decree since 1983 after a federal lawsuit that alleged discrimination of minorities in police hiring and promotions. Also in effect is a 2013 federal monitoring agreement covering the police department’s performance in dealing minority communities.

Civil service officials could not detail more precisely how many minorities applied for this year’s test because information on ethnic background is voluntary on the test application and a significant number do not answer the question.

About 10 percent of police officers are Hispanic, officials said.

County officials also said

2,401, or 12.1 percent of the nearly 20,000 applicants this year, applied under a separate category of Spanish-speaking police officer. Those applicants must take a Spanish language test.

Police candidates must be high school graduates or have an equivalency degree. They must have a driver’s license and be between the ages of 19 ½ and 35 by test time, although state rules give military veterans a longer period of eligibility.

There is no residency requirement for the test, although town and village departments that hire from the same list can give preference to residents.

Nassau County does not have a police test this year.

Applicants for Suffolk County Police test

2003	18,829
2007	28,776
2011	31,039
2015	20,667
2019	19,833

Source: Suffolk County Executive



Suffolk police officials attributed the test numbers in a strong economy to extended recruitment efforts.

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