

Pittsfield Police Department Receives Donation Of Segway

by Meggin Dail



Rob Freese stands alongside Chief Robert Wharem, Selectman Ed Vien, Sergeant Jeff Cain (on Segway), Selectmen Denise Morin, Linda Small, Larry Konopka and Town Administrator, Leon Kenison.

Tuesday, August 5, 2008 Rob Freese officially presented his gift of a Segway XM to the Pittsfield Police Department. On hand to receive the donation were town officials Leon Kenison, Larry Konopka, Linda Small, Denise Morin, Ed Vien and Chief of Police Robert Wharem and Sergeant Jeff Cain of the Pittsfield Police Department.

The Segway has been in possession of the Police Department since Friday, July 18 and, therefore, not only been in use, but also been a helpful element in community policing already, especially during the balloon rally. Tuesday, July 29th each of the officers of the police department were given a lengthy demonstration on the Segway's features; including anti-theft devices, lights and siren and then given a chance to try it out for themselves.

Why a Segway? Freese felt that the donation of the Segway would “get the officers out in the community they police, face to face; to make personal contact in the duration of their shifts.” He also stated that he felt the height of the Segway would increase surveillance ability while the department is out on their walking patrols.

Being head and shoulders above the crowd can be quite an asset to officers, especially when looking for a suspect or missing child that might otherwise be lost in a sea of people according to Sgt. Cain who rode the Segway most of the weekend of the rally. An unexpected bonus of the Segway particularly during Balloon Rally was being able to get from one place to another quickly despite congested streets and sidewalks. Where it would have been difficult to respond on foot and almost impossible to respond by cruiser, the Segway got the job done. “It’s also a great ice breaker for those who are otherwise reluctant to talk to police officers,” said Cain. Teenagers would comment on how cool it was as it passed by them. Adults asked how the Segway worked and where it came from. Younger children would ask if they could ride too. Regardless, the Segway is definitely a great public relations tool.

How does the Segway work? It runs on a battery that uses approximately ten cents of electricity to recharge. The steering and drive of the Segway is all about the rider. When you lean one way; it turns in that direction. When you lean slightly forward; it moves forward. The “steering” is all based on your body motion and speed depends on your stance. The Segway can go up to 13 miles an hour and stop on a dime. It also has a zero degree turning radius.

“I think the only downside of the Segway,” reports Sgt. Richard Walter, “is deciding who gets to use it.” Besides all of the professional and economical benefits it provides, “It’s a lot of fun!”

Economics had a lot to do with this donation. Freese felt that with town departments struggling to stay within their budgets while gas prices continue to rise, the Segway was a great answer to getting officers out of their cruisers but still monitoring the downtown area. “I believe every citizen needs to do their part to help these officers function as best they can,” Freese said, “and it’s up to the citizens, not just the town employees, to support these efforts.”

Time and time again, the request has been to see police officers on foot in the downtown area, and while that is made possible by walking grants and bike grants, the Segway will make those “on foot” officers that much more visible and mobile for the public. Of course, the lights and siren are also a bonus.

Community policing is exactly what Chief Wharem had in mind when he waited while Freese Segway-ed himself across the street one day. “What do you think one of those [Segways] could do for the police department?” Wharem asked. Freese’s answer? “There are several opportunities for the Segway to be used; as basic community policing, alongside the walking patrol one officer can cover a lot of ground,” and the donation of a brand new Segway.

The Pittsfield Police Department thanks Rob Freese for his extremely generous donation of the Segway XM, alleviating some of the need to use cruisers downtown and appreciates his endeavors to forward public relations among the police and its community.