

Waterloo trying to bash image as crime-infested

WATERLOO (AP) — This northeast Iowa city has the state's highest homicide rate, with half of them still unsolved.

Does that make Waterloo a dangerous place?

Not necessarily, says Police Chief Bernal Koehrsen, who calls Waterloo a "typical, Midwest, industrial-based city."

"Nobody is immune to crime and violence," he said. "I think we have a very unfairly gained reputation."

Yet on a per capita basis, no large city in the state comes close to Waterloo's homicide rate.

So far this year, a trimmed down, overworked police force has investigated eight homicides in the city of 66,467 people — the state's fifth largest. As of mid-December, four were solved.

Des Moines, with 193,187 people, has had 13 slayings as of mid-December.

Cedar Rapids, with 108,751 people, has had three homicides.

Davenport, population 95,333, has had six homicides.

Sioux City, with 80,505 people, has had three.

"For crime, per capita, we're No. 1 in the state," Black Hawk County Sheriff Mike Kubik says. "It's not something to be proud of."

Last year, Waterloo had no homicides, Koehrsen points out. In a typical year, Waterloo police handle no more than four or five slayings, he said.

Clearly, this is not a typical year.

Aggravated assaults are up 15 percent. The number of cases submitted for prosecution has jumped almost 10 percent, jamming the already crowded dockets of Black Hawk County District Court judges.

"The increase of cases is tremendous. It's much, much busier this year than ever before," court administrator Karen Hibbeh-Levi says.

Gang activity is one reason violent crime is high in this northeast Iowa region. The economy is another.

Waterloo's unemployment rate was 5.1 percent for the first 10 months of 1993. Although it's

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down from 5.7 percent in 1992, it's still higher than the 3.3 percent statewide rate from January through October of this year.

"A lot of it is based out of poverty and hopelessness," Koehrsen said.

Tight budgets have left fewer police officers and sheriff's deputies to handle the upsurge in violent crime, which the Iowa Department of Public Safety says rose 6.9 percent statewide from 1991 to 1992.

"I think all the crooks have moved to Waterloo," Kubik said. "We don't know why ourselves. We haven't figured it out. It's just been climbing steadily, and it hasn't peaked yet."

In the county, the state's fourth-largest with 123,000 people, thefts are up 246 percent, sexual assaults 200 percent and aggravated assaults 28 percent.

Kubik compares crime to fashion. If bell-bottoms or miniskirts or body-piercing is the rage on the West and East coasts, it's only a matter of

time before the trend comes to the Midwest.

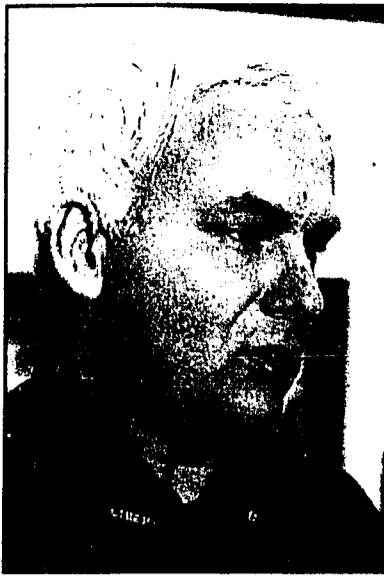
"You want to look where our future is? Go to California. Go to New York," he said. "Everyone thinks we've got a nice, quiet community. It's coming at us. We're in the middle, and it's coming at us. Crime is going to almost double."

Koehrsen says too much is being made of Waterloo's crime problem, although he adds "we're running \$20,000 ahead of schedule" on a \$150,000 overtime budget.

"We are not a city on the edge. We are well in control. There is not rampant fear in the city," he

"For crime, per capita, we're No. 1 in the state. It's not something to be proud of."

Mike Kubik, sheriff



Bernal Koehrsen
Police chief

said. "The statistics say it's a typical year. The numbers here are not a big deal."

"I don't mean to downplay the fact that people are suffering from violence and crime, but it's not worth calling out the National Guard."

His comments were made just days before the separate slayings of two people — Gladys Held, 83, and Jacob "Jake" Biretz, 87 — who lived a few blocks apart.

"Crime has become a part of life. Right now, that's the reality we have to deal with," says Mayor Al Manning, who leaves office Jan. 3 after serving a single two-year term.

"Most of us in Waterloo realize that people in other parts of the state have negative perceptions of our city, and we're working to improve that," he said.

Officers work around budget woes

WATERLOO (AP) — Crime is up. Morale is down. So is money to law enforcement agencies.

"We're the only department in the state with sworn officers on layoff," Police Chief Bernal Koehrsen said.

Koehrsen says he needs a minimum of 126 officers to protect the public. He had that 3½ years ago when he took the chief's job after 22 years in the Air Force Security Police.

The department has 114 officers. Investigators recently logged the city's eighth homicide. Four are unsolved.

To Koehrsen, the trouble started when Al Manning was elected mayor in 1991. The city had a \$500,000 deficit and Manning, who previously was a shipping supervisor for Altstadt Langlas Baking Co., ordered across-the-board budget cuts.

Manning, who leaves office Jan. 3, defends the budget cuts and says Waterloo "is a great place to live. It's on its way up."

"More officers alone can't solve crime problems. It runs deeper than that," he said.

Of the 114 officers, 103 are at the rank of sergeant and below.

"Morale can't be overly good when the remaining officers have to do more work with less people," Koehrsen said. "There's a fear among some of the younger officers that other people might be laid off."

To cover the manpower shortage, the chief has beefed up street patrol with investigators, leaving less time and fewer people working to solve crimes.

Last summer, when drive-by shootings and homicides were at their highest, "investigators some weeks were putting in 100 hours," Koehrsen said.

The pace is the same for Black Hawk County's 60 sheriff's deputies.

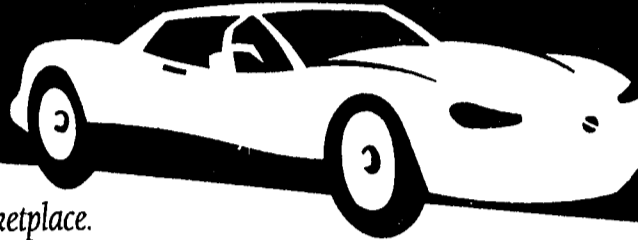
Sheriff Mike Kubik says he has been unable to squeeze more money out of the county Board of Supervisors, although a new \$14.5 million jail is being built.

He's getting more help for the new jail, which will hold 272 prisoners, compared with 64 now. But Kubik says he needs at least another patrol deputy and one to work in the increasingly overburdened civil division.

"I'm not asking for much," Kubik says. "Not just crime has increased. The civil papers and court filings have gone up. Our court hearings have gone up. Everything just keeps going up, and we haven't moved."

Kubik says he has only 16 deputies working three shifts, seven days a week, to patrol 586,000 square miles in Iowa's fourth-largest county. The rest of the deputies are spread out in the department's civil, jail, investigations and court divisions.

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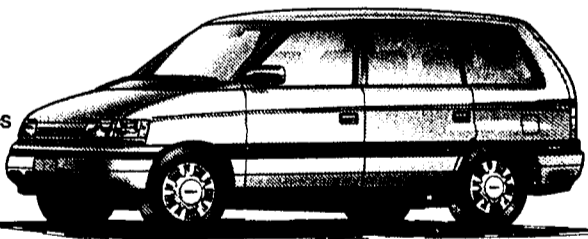
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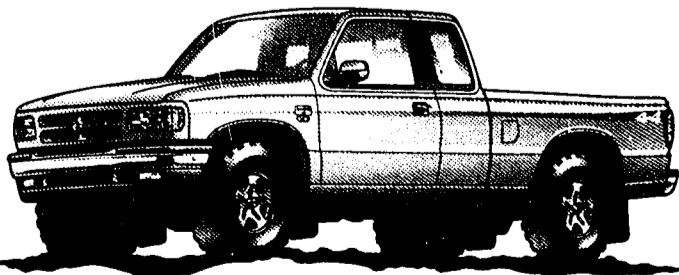


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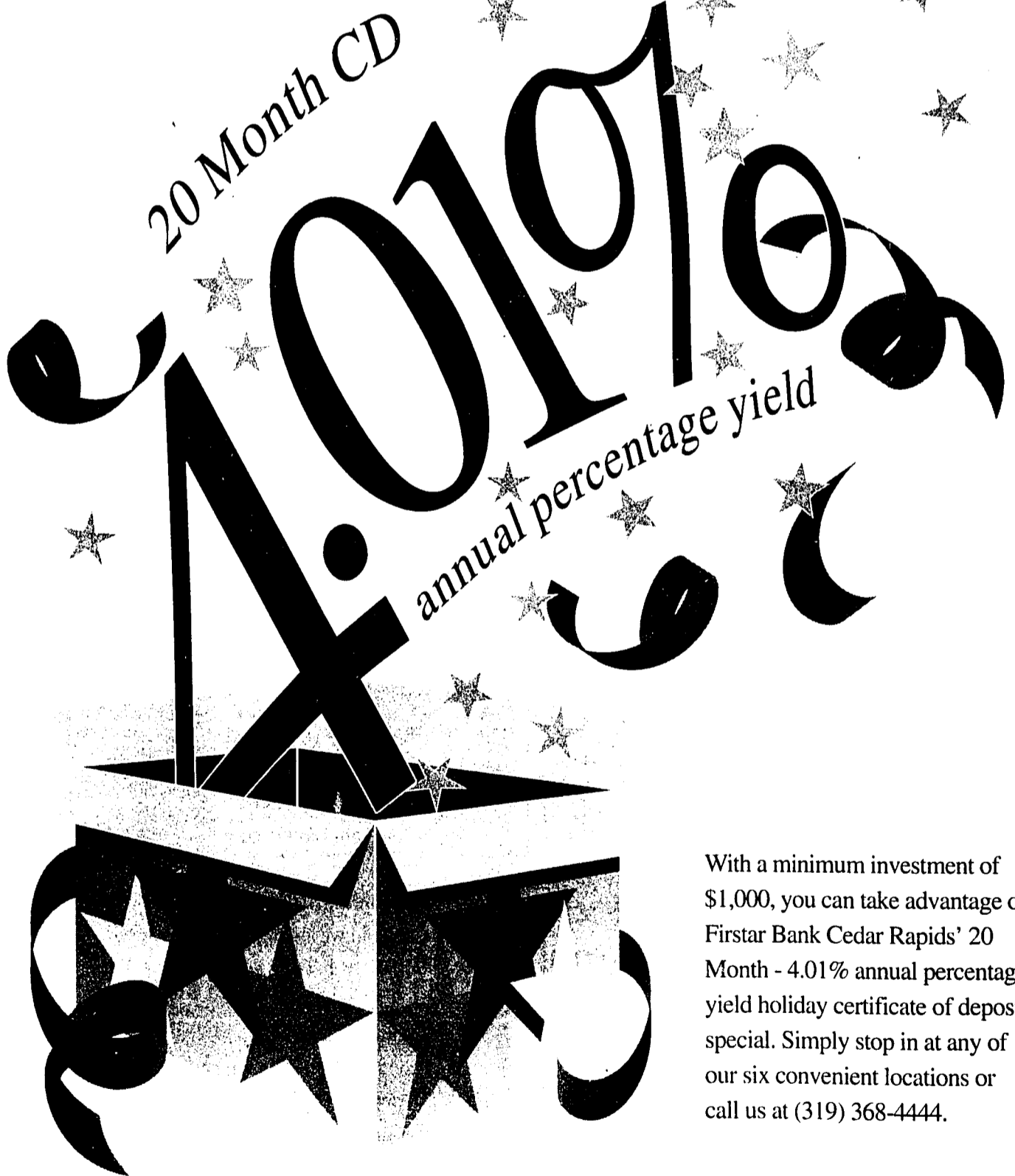
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