Menomonie’s new police chief gets to know his beat

By Pamela Powers
Menomonie News Bureau

MENOMONIE — Police Chief Eric Atkinson said he's glad to be in Menomonie despite a hectic first few days on the job.

Atkinson, 37, started working as the new Menomonie police chief Monday.

"I'm elated to be here," Atkinson said. "It was the right decision coming here."

Atkinson has been busy meeting Menomonie city officials and other residents since he took over as chief. The people have been welcoming, Atkinson said, and have discussed their goal of making sure Menomonie remains a safe, enjoyable place to live and work.

"You have so many people invested in the community who want to see it grow and prosper and be safe," Atkinson said.

Atkinson, who is married with two children, said he wants community members to feel comfortable approaching him with concerns. Working with the community will enable police officers to better protect residents, he said.
Atkinson was a Hudson Police Department lieutenant before he was hired as Menomonie's top cop in July. Hudson experiences more crime that is influenced by the Twin Cities metro area, which typically means more violent and white-collar crimes, he said. As the Twin Cities and St. Croix County continue to grow, Atkinson said, he anticipates crime could grow in this part of Wisconsin.

While Atkinson said UW-Stout adds vibrancy to Menomonie, he acknowledged the university also poses challenges to police. Part of the Police Department's job is to educate students about the consequences of drug and alcohol use. He plans to work with UW-Stout police Chief Lisa Walter to curb abuse of those substances.

"We want to prevent drinking and driving," he said. "We want to make sure they understand the problems that come with alcohol abuse. It comes down to the safety of people."

Menomonie Mayor Randy Knaack described the new chief as a down-to-earth person with good leadership skills.

"He will be a people person for Menomonie," Knaack said.

City Administrator Lowell Prange echoed that sentiment, saying Atkinson is approachable and personable.

"I think he will be a really good fit for Menomonie," Prange said.

Atkinson said he expects to move to Menomonie within the next two months. He replaces interim Chief Chris Langlois, who is retiring.

Late last year the Menomonie Police and Fire Commission hired Steve Hebbe, a deputy police chief in Anchorage, Alaska, as the new chief. He withdrew from the position a short time later.

The previous chief, Wayne Stolpa, left the city in January 2010 after the commission heard four residents' complaints about alleged misconduct while in office. Stolpa, the commission and the City Council reached an agreement in which the city paid Stolpa $79,927 to leave the job.

Powers can be reached at 715-556-9018 or pamela.powers@ecpc.com.