

Gifts to Town Employees – Including Police Officers

I first want to state that I appreciate and respect all the citizens and public who want to express their gratitude and honor for the service that is rendered by the police officers who work for the Town of Leland. The recent news reports highlighting the town policies that included segments of my discussion with reporters does not contain all of my thoughts and statements regarding this issue, and may not have accurately portrayed the full meaning behind some of the statements. Moreover, the conclusions expressed by the news reports, or inferred by the viewer, may not clearly reflect my position. I have not stated that the Adopt-A-Cop program is unethical, nor have I questioned the integrity of our police officers.

As the Town Manager, I am responsible for ensuring that all town policies are followed. The same policies apply to every employee regardless of position or rank. When a new scenario that might conflict with the policies is introduced to our organization, I discuss the issue with our management team of directors and will often seek legal guidance from the town's attorney. Often we find that our policy is very sound and accurate. Occasionally, we find the need to adjust our policies. We attempt to create the safest and ethically sound policies possible, so that we stay far from the line that would have anyone question our motives or integrity. As public servants, we do not want even the perception of impropriety.

As such, the town has a policy which states that no employee can accept gifts or donations of any kind. There are a variety of reasons for this policy including NC State statutes, ethics, fairness, and equality, among others. It is not intended to alienate or offend anyone. I hope it is not viewed that way. Our policy is to avoid placing any employee in a position where they are faced with a potential ethical dilemma that they otherwise could avoid, and to assure the public that they are receiving honest and fair treatment from all employees.

The current policy has been in place for nearly a decade. Every employee acknowledged their understanding and their commitment to adherence of the town policies through the human resources department as part of their employment with the town, so this is nothing new to anyone who is, or has been, affiliated with the Town.

I feel there is still an opportunity for an Adopt-A-Cop type program to have an active role in our community. However, those who want to support the police officers should seek ways of showing that support other than giving gifts directly to employees. I encourage people in the community to write letters of support, send thank you notes, organize prayer vigils, provide a hearty handshake and a pat on the back to the officers directly, encourage others in the community to follow suit, and a host of other things, other than giving gifts. While, I believe the town government supports the officers appropriately and shows that appreciation in a variety of ways, if you do not think the town government is providing adequately for police officers and they deserve something extra, express that point of view through the existing channels of the government, such as public comment in the Council meetings and during our budget workshops, and advocate for your position in the community. Build that groundswell of support, but allow the sound and accurate policies of the Town to stay intact. Allow the employees, as public servants, to keep far away from the perception of any impropriety and stay far above the fray of unseemliness.

On a personal note, I believe I support the police and their honest dedication as much as anyone. I appreciate and respect their service and I advocate on their behalf. I know their lives matter; they certainly matter to me, as I feel the burden of their safety on a daily basis.

David Hollis
Town Manager