



KENTWOOD POLICE DEPARTMENT

THOMAS G. HILLEN | CHIEF OF POLICE

PRESS RELEASE

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First Cadet From Kentwood Police Department's Academic Sponsorship Program Sworn In as Officer

Former Police Cadet Jesalyn Heard Takes on New Role

Kentwood, Michigan, May 15, 2019 – The City of Kentwood has welcomed Jesalyn Heard to the Kentwood Police Department, the first cadet to go through its new academic sponsorship program and the first African-American woman to serve as a police officer in the Department's 51-year history.

Heard took the oath of office on Monday, May 13. The former Kentwood police cadet recently graduated from Grand Rapids Community College, where she was on the dean's list, with an associate degree in criminal justice. She also completed the GRCC Police Academy in April.

Kentwood's police cadet program has launched many careers in law enforcement throughout Michigan for more than 25 years. The program provides eligible students studying criminal justice the opportunity to gain hands-on experience with the Police Department.

"About a year ago, the City Commission agreed to support the Kentwood Police Department's recruiting efforts by providing an academic sponsorship program to outstanding cadets attending the police academy," said Kentwood Police Chief Thomas Hillen. "Jesalyn is our first recipient of that program. We're delighted to celebrate her journey and welcome her to the team as an officer, where she'll continue to serve the City of Kentwood and its residents with excellence."

The cadet program allows students to develop their decision making, critical thinking and communication skills, preparing them for a career in the criminal justice system. Additionally, cadets ride-along with officers, observing their day-to-day functions. In order to qualify for the sponsorship program, cadets must maintain full-time enrollment status, as well as high academic standards.

“The cadet program gave me a great foundation of knowledge going into the police academy,” Heard said. “The experiences I gained helped me grasp concepts quicker and gain more insight throughout my education.”

Heard grew up in the Grand Rapids and Kentwood areas. She attended East Kentwood High School where she was an accomplished athlete in basketball and track. Her parents are also in law enforcement. Her father serves as a sergeant with the Grand Rapids Community College Police Department and her mother works for a warden with the Michigan Department of Corrections.

This is Heard’s first law enforcement job; she hopes to eventually serve in the Department’s Community Services Bureau so she can work with Kentwood’s youth.

“When it was time to make a decision about my career, I knew Kentwood was where I needed to be. Not only because of the bonds I had created with the KPD family through the cadet program, but because of my connection to this community,” Heard said. “I want to speak to youth and let them know how important it is to make positive choices and that it is possible to choose a good path no matter what life has thrown their way.”

The new officer also has an interest in the special response team, which is utilized during critical incidents and during the execution of high-risk search warrants.

“We’re proud of Jesalyn’s passion to serve the area she grew up in,” Chief Hillen said. “She has worked hard to achieve this position – I’m confident she will do an outstanding job.”

Heard currently resides in Grand Rapids with her fiancé and two children.

More information about the Kentwood Police Department is available online at kentwood.us.

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