

24-page grand jury report released

Report: Vinton's ex-top cops 'unsuitable and unqualified'

"In our opinion, town officials would have been derelict in their duties had they permitted either [Chief Ricky] Foutz or [Lt. Bill] Brown to remain at the VPD in any capacity," the grand jury wrote.

By KIMBERLY O'BRIEN
THE ROANOKE TIMES

Marijuana burned in barrels and flushed down toilets. Stolen weapons recovered but not returned to owners.

Rikes for needy children given to the police department's families and friends.

Slush funds. Unlawful arrests. Intimidation of witnesses.

The list goes on, but that's what a special grand jury investigating the Vinton Police Department found. The details, made public Friday in a 24-page report, paint a picture of two cops who the jury described as "unsuitable and unqualified" to have held the positions they did.

The details also, according to the report, back up the decision of Vinton town officials to force the resignations of Chief Ricky Foutz and Lt. Bill Brown shortly after the investigation began last fall.

"Neither have the leadership ability or the management skills required for the positions of chief and assistant chief of police for the town of Vinton," the jury wrote. "In our opinion, town officials would have been derelict in their duties had they permitted either Foutz or Brown to remain at the VPD in any capacity."

Town officials said Friday they were "thankful" and "relieved" that the report had been made public. Town Attorney Buck Heartwell said the report should make clear to the public why council had to take the

VINTON POLICE REPORT


The special grand jury that investigated the Vinton police department says the former chief and his top lieutenant mismanaged money, drugs, guns and other evidence. Among the highlights, the report found:

- Drugs were improperly disposed of without court order. In some cases, Lt. Bill Brown said he burned drugs at his home, without witnesses. Other drugs were "sent to the wind."
- Among the guns in the department's possession were several that had been reported stolen by their owners, but whose recovery had never been reported either to them or to state police.
- The officers admitted their handling of evidence was "a joke." Drugs were sometimes left on Brown's desk or in his office.
- The officers gave away bicycles and keys left over from the Christmas toy giveaway to department employees and friends, rather than hold them for next season.
- The officers charged for fingerprints and put the cash in a "personal slush fund."
- Such poor records were kept on the department's charitable activities that \$3,179 remains unaccounted for, leaving open "the possibility of misuse of these funds."


The inside story

- The special grand jury report is made public — for all of three hours. **A3**
- Excerpts from the grand jury report. **A3**

Foutz



Brown



PLEASE SEE REPORT/A3

After the Virginia Supreme Justice Christian Compton praised the police for such an awe-inspiring job, this item broke in the Roanoke Times, the daily paper. The Grand Jury found that Foutz and Brown had been running their own loan business with Town funds they collected for doing fingerprint cards. Taking bicycles that were meant for needy children and giving them to friends and the children of the police officers in their command. Taking guns from the evidence room for their own use and taking property from people without charging them with a crime.

Brown was supposed to get a court order for confiscated drugs and destroy them before witnesses. He didn't bother with that, claimed he burned some, flushed some down the toilet and threw some to the

wind. I doubt he would destroy something negotiable as drugs if he is stealing money and bicycles and guns. He was getting rid of them someway and that someway could have been through Blaine Hodges.

Brown's wife Carmine, "accidentally" killed herself by running the car in a closed garage at their home. When Brown "found" her he called the Vinton Police Department and not the Botetourt Sheriff Office which had jurisdiction. The Medical Examiner Dr David Oxley called it an accident. The same ME that said Blaine Hodges had been dead twenty-four to thirty-six hours longer than the rest of the Hodges. I sent an e-mail to the Virginia State Police claiming it sounded like murder. The State Police sent my complaint right back to the Salem State Police District Office and on to the Commonwealth Attorney of that county. I called the police and they said they had no jurisdiction in the matter.

Who doesn't know not to run a vehicle in a closed garage? This happened right before the Town and Foutz and Brown were the defendants in a lawsuit claiming sexual harassment and discrimination from one of the females in the department.

The entire thing stinks of cover-up and insurance doesn't pay for murder or suicide, but it may pay double for accidental death. I don't know if insurance was involved but the Virginia State Police should look into it. I believed anyone could report a crime. Not when it involves cops in Virginia. There are a dozen laws broken that Foutz and Brown could have been, but were never, charged. For a time the Grand Jury

findings were kept under seal. Then a Judge allowed the news media to look at the findings for three hours with the requirement nothing could be copied or photographed. Finally, the entire record was made public with a few names blacked out. If you know a lot about powerful people you can break all kinds of laws and never be punished. Maybe get away with murder.



This is Michael Stovall, a Vinton cop at the time of the Hodges murders. He now works for a bank the last time I checked.

He helped make the phony video and found the old lady that said she saw the truck. He is your typical "law enforcement" officer even now. Stovall was the one that testified the lights were not installed where the woman saw the truck. He claims the lights made no difference and all the new information has no bearing on Bramblett's guilt. I'm sure with that kind of thinking he will do well in politics. The cops and the lawyers in the Roanoke area make a good team. There are about enough effective lawyers in the area that aren't dependent on sucking up to the police and courts to counton the fingers of one hand. None of these were anywhere near the Bramblett trial.

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