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GANNETT WISCONSIN MEDIA INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

Names vanish on police reports

Liability concerns prompt redactions to protect privacy

By Eric Litke

Gannett Wisconsin Media **Investigative Team**

Police work that has traditionally been conducted in public view is increasingly being shielded, as insurance companies and municipal attorneys throughout Wisconsin push departments to withhold names from reports due to liability concerns.

A long-ignored federal privacy law is driving the redactions, interpreted by some municipal leaders to overrule a state public records law that says the full reports should be released.

With a growing number of departments redacting crash reports — and, in some cases, all incident reports — drivers injured in crashes may have no right to the identity of the other motorist, and communities can be kept in the dark about who police are arresting.

In Sheboygan Falls, Brenda O'Malley spent 13 days tracking down a crash report identifying the man who crashed into her daughter's car after police wouldn't release an unredacted report under the new policy. After the March 14 crash, she called everyone from the mayor and city attorney to the federal Department of Transportation before being pointed to the full reports available through the state Department of Transportation.

"It's completely ridiculous," said O'Malley, 45. "I understand they're trying to protect the party, but, I'm sorry, where was the protection for my

See POLICE, Page A4



Metro/State \$2 See Page 2 for pricing details www.postcrescent.com

Index

Advice **C2** Books **C4** Business Careers Voices Crossword Good Neighbors Homes

Horoscope

Life! C1 Local **A3** Obituaries B6 Sports Travel ... C12 TV book Inside Vitals Weather Wheels **F8**



GOOD MORNING, FOX VALLEY

Today's **Best Bets** ■ www.postcrescent.com

ART FEST: Nature's **Images Art Fair** fundraiser at 1000 **Islands Environmental** Center, Kaukauna. Free. 10 a.m.

IN STYLE: Fox Cities Vintage Fashion Show, Radisson Paper Valley Hotel, Appleton. Fashions from '50s through '80s. \$15. 2 p.m.

CHAPEL CONCERT: Lawrence University Percussion Ensemble in concert at Memorial Chapel, Appleton. Free. 3 p.m.

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