

Boca considers armored vehicle purchase

There may be a BearCat coming to Boca Raton — not a new sports team, but an armored vehicle requested by the police department. At its last meeting the City Council authorized spending \$250,000 on a vehicle of the department's choosing.

"This fills a gap in our current needs of providing advanced tactical protection," Boca Raton Police Chief Dan Alexander said.

He cited "active shooter," barricaded subjects, citizen rescues and evacuation, and protection of SWAT members and other officers serving search and arrest warrants as possible scenarios in which an armored vehicle could be used.

Alexander said the department is looking for a vehicle that can provide protection from bullets fired from high-powered rifles and from potentially explosive devices. "We will look at weapons of mass destruction specifications," he added.

Although the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office has several armored vehicles, availability, distance and time could make it difficult for a PBSO vehicle to respond to a situation in the city, Alexander said.

Coral Springs, which like Boca Raton has a medium-sized police department, will have an armored vehicle or personnel carrier in its 2008 budget, said Deputy Chief Tony Pustizzi. He said the city has been using a converted armored car for about five years and is looking for "the ultimate vehicle that is not really obtrusive."

The BearCat, an armored vehicle used by PBSO and other local departments as well as many police agencies around the country, could be just the model both departments are looking for. "The BearCat is definitely an option we're looking at," Pustizzi said.

"The BearCat is one of the options," said Alexander, adding that the model is well known because of the number of police agencies using it. He said large agencies like the Broward Sheriff's Office and Florida Highway Patrol



own the vehicle. Cape Coral, where Alexander was chief before coming to Boca Raton last year, also owns a BearCat. "We're not looking at creating an overbearing military appearance," Alexander said.

Lenco Industries is the Massachusetts company that manufactures the BearCat and other armored vehicles used by law enforcement, the military, government agencies and private security forces. Owner Len Light said "There is a distinction between military and police vehicles."

But the BearCat law enforcement model provides much the same protection as the military version, Light said. Its armor plate meets military specifications and prevents armor-piercing ammunition and some types of explosives from harming occupants. At the same time it allows police inside the vehicle to fire their weapons. Feb. 28 marks the 10th anniversary of a 44-minute shootout between two bank robbers wearing body armor and armed with automatic rifles and police in North Hollywood, California. Seventeen people, including police and civilians, were wounded or injured before the gunmen were killed.

It is an incident that Alexander said is on his mind.

Both the Los Angeles Police Department and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department now own armored vehicles. *(Each has a Lenco BEAR and two Lenco BearCats.)*