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PARK RIDGE POLICE MUM ON SQUAD CAR CHASE UNTIL I-TEAM INQUIRY

For four days after a devastating car accident in Park Ridge, local police officials put out statements that omitted police involvement in the crash.

An ABC7 I-Team Investigation

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By Chuck Goudie and Christine Tressel

Monday, June 08, 2015 07:10PM

PARK RIDGE, Ill. (WLS) -- For four days after a devastating car accident in northwest suburban Park Ridge, local police officials put out several statements describing what had happened.

During that time, one major fact wasn't included in the public statements: that a police cruiser had been chasing one of the cars.

Park Ridge Police Chief Frank Kaminski is concerned that the omission may leave an impression his department was trying to manipulate the story and protect police. "There is no cover-up" Kaminski told the I-Team.

This is what the authorities reported initially:

Two cars had been traveling at very high speeds last Wednesday night, when one of them ran a red light and t-boned another car at the intersection of Devon and Cumberland Avenues. Four people were

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hurt, some seriously, including two who were ejected. Police were asking for witnesses and looking for video.

What was not included in police statements for several days was police already had both: one of their own officers had witnessed the apparent street racing and the crash that ended it and his cruiser camera recorded it.

That lapse of information so angered one person familiar with the case, that they contacted the I-Team on Friday with details about what police were not revealing to the public.

The police source told us that a "marked squad car" had intercepted what appeared to be a drag race and then gave chase, at up to 100 miles per hours, on Devon Ave. He said that the high-speed pursuit and the eventual accident were all caught on police dash camera video.

The source told us to file a request with the Park Ridge Police Dept. for the dash cam video from squad car P-41, which we did on Friday afternoon.

Late Sunday, about 90 hours after the accident, Park Ridge officials issued an amended public statement that acknowledged the police chase and the existence of dash cam video. Police Chief Frank Kaminski said that the officer involved had been removed from street duty and given a desk job pending an independent review of the incident. Chief Kaminski also said that the officer, at least a ten year veteran of the force, had been treated at a hospital following the accident. "He was physically upset, had high blood pressure and was traumatized by what he saw."

Kaminski said that the patrolman provided a statement last Friday about the Wednesday night accident, claiming that he had been involved in a two-block pursuit, with emergency lights and siren activated. Kaminski said there are now two investigations underway:

First, to determine whether the officer's conduct during the chase was proper: "For a traffic violation you are allowed some leeway to speed and in order to make that stop. Now the question comes, was that officer's behavior at that time within those guidelines?" Kaminski told the I-Team.

Second, to determine why public police reports did not include information about the police chase. "I don't know that we did a good job of really getting all of the information together. Who is to blame for that I'm not sure but that is going to be part of the investigation too. I would like to know why," Kaminski said.



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After the wreck, a 20-year-old Park Ridge man driving a Chevrolet and his two passengers - an 18-year-old woman and a 20-year-old man - were taken to Advocate Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge. They had serious injuries.



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A 24-year-old Park Ridge woman was taken to Resurrection Medical Center with non-life-threatening injuries. Our FOIA request for the dash cam video has been denied by Park Ridge police, claiming that release would impede an ongoing investigation.

Kaminski, who has been Park Ridge chief for six years following a 32-year tenure in Evanston, will be sworn in on Saturday as president of the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police.

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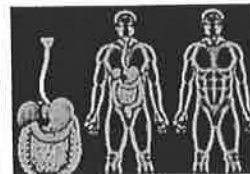
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