

Compassionate cop reflects on career

Written by MARK JAEGER
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Chief Meloy says the key to effective police work is relating to the public

For retiring Saukville Police Chief Bill Meloy, law enforcement has never been about power and the iron fist of authority.

It has been about relationships.

“You would be surprised how easy this job can be when you make a point of relating to people,” Meloy said.

“Even when you are making a traffic stop, if you approach the driver with courtesy and respect and explain what you are doing, I would say 95% of the time, they will say ‘Thank you.’”



Meloy has been practicing that “kinder, gentler approach” to police work since he joined the Saukville Police Department as a part-time officer in 1968.

“You have to like people. Be willing to look them in the eye. The key to this job is remembering you are here to serve the public. We work for the taxpayers of Saukville,” Meloy said.

On April 4, 1973, Meloy was named the department’s first full-time chief. He has held the post for 40 years, and his last day on the job will be Tuesday, June 4.

Meloy turned a youthful 70 this spring.

“When you think about it, it is pretty remarkable. How many communities can say they haven’t had to find a chief of police for 40 years?” Meloy joked.

Saukville’s search for a replacement was about as painless as it could be, too, with Lt. Jeff

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Goetz — the department's second in command — poised to step in as the new chief.

Goetz has been with the department for 28 years.

"Chief is the only boss I have ever known," Goetz said.

Although he has been near the top of the department's chain of command for years, Goetz said he never thought it was a given he would become the next chief.

"I always just felt lucky to have a job in this department," Goetz said.

Goetz shook his head when asked if he was anxious to implement changes to leave his mark on the department when he takes over as chief on June 5.

"Why would I want to change things? We have great people and everything is working. Why fix something that isn't broken?" Goetz asked.

One break from tradition is certain. Goetz said he has no intention to emulate Meloy's longevity and serve four decades heading the department.

"I don't think I'll still be alive in 40 years," he said.

After all these years, Meloy said he still marvels at how things worked out.

He grew up in Cedarburg, graduating from Cedarburg High School.

Meloy has a degree in police science, and has attended countless law-enforcement courses offered through the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Technical College, the Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association and the FBI.

Still, he laughs when thinking about his police academy training.

"I didn't attend rookie school in Milwaukee until after I had been named chief. I wanted to see what the new officers were going to be put through, so I signed up," Meloy said.

"On graduation day, when they were announcing the names of all of the rookies who graduated, they said, with kind of a laugh, '... and Saukville Police Chief William Meloy.'"

Meloy said he values the training he has received, adding, "but you can't teach discretion or common sense."

As the chief of a small department, Meloy said he never felt he was above even the most menial of jobs.

"If it is pouring rain outside and there is an accident, I don't think twice about going out and directing traffic around the crash scene," he said.

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“I may not enjoy it, but I’ll do it. It was never a question of, ‘I’m too important to do that.’”

To underscore that point, Meloy noted the chief’s squad car is not the latest vehicle on the lot, but a 2001 Chevy Impala.

Goetz said officers can’t help but notice Meloy’s selfless attitude.

“It was good to know that no matter what, Chief was on our side. It is a real team approach,” Goetz said.

He is counting on that dedication to the department continuing after Meloy retires.

“I have already told him I’ll be calling,” Goetz said.

Goetz said Meloy’s longevity has given him contacts that reach amazingly far.

“He knows someone in every department in the state. I remember we once had a question about hunting laws, and Chief said, ‘I’ll find out the answer,’” Goetz said.

“The next thing you know, he was on the phone — talking with the secretary of the DNR.”

Meloy’s expertise also came into play in the planning of the Saukville Municipal Center, which became home to the police department in 1982, as well as the new police station which was completed in 2009.

Although an old-school police chief, he also embraced technology, and was instrumental in bringing laptop computers into department squad cars and adopting new communication and record-keeping software.

Meloy’s community involvement earned recognitions from the Saukville Lions Club, Saukville Chamber of Commerce, Landt-Thiel American Legion Post, Salvation Army, Saukville Rebels youth football team, and many state organizations.

During its 16 year run, Meloy was also the constable of the Crossroads Rendezvous, often patrolling the Peninsula Park campground in his buckskin suit.

While police work has been a big part of his life, family plays an even more critical role.

He married the former Gloria Klug on Oct. 12, 1962, at St. Peter’s United Church of Christ, where the couple continue to be members.

“When I come home from work, Gloria never asks me about business. We have never had a police scanner at home. Family time is family time,” Meloy said.

He always found time for his four now-grown children, nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

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Meloy is also a devoted outdoorsman who has served as a deputy conservation warden for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for 35 years.

There is a certain satisfaction in his voice when he looks back at his career in law enforcement.

“After all of these years, I can honestly say there was never a day where I dreaded going to work. Police work is an important quality-of-life issue for this community,” Meloy said.

An open house for Meloy will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday, June 4, at the Saukville Police Station.

Refreshments will be served in the police training room.

Image Information: SAUKVILLE POLICE CHIEF Bill Meloy (left) is ready to turn over the reins of the police department to his longtime second in command, Lt. Jeff Goetz.
Photo by Mark Jaeger