



Patterson Promoted to Knightstown Police Chief

Nov. 14, 2006

By Stacy Cox

General Manager

References to Marshal Matt Dillon and Sheriff Andy Taylor were quickly shrugged off by Knightstown's new police chief, Earl Patterson. Those icons made for good television, but their approaches to law enforcement hardly fit in the twenty-first century, where the top KPD officer believes working and communicating well with others is essential.

"I don't want to disappoint," said Patterson. "I can't promise the world. But I'm going to do the best job I can. I'm going to do the job people want me to do, what the taxpayers pay us to do."

Patterson, a fulltime Knightstown Police Department officer since May 2005, was appointed the town's new Chief of Police on Wednesday, Nov. 8, during a special town council meeting. Former Chief of Police James Radford, who hired Patterson on at the department, resigned from the top spot Sept. 9. Patterson's promotion to police chief fills an eight-week vacancy.

Patterson joined the KPD after five years as Deputy Town Marshal for the Town of Shirley, his first fulltime position on a police force. His experience working in Shirley was cited often by Patterson during a conversation on Tuesday.

"I really like the whole idea of community policing in a small town, getting out and meeting people," said Patterson. "I liked when I worked in Shirley that when people waved to you or you waved to them, you knew who they were and they knew you."

Knightstown residents have shown him the same friendliness, he said, expressing his appreciation also for the good working relationships between KPD officers.

"I like getting to know people. I've found if you treat with respect, the respect they deserve, you are treated the same way in return," he said. "Let's face it, nine out of ten times when someone calls us, there's a problem. So, when we show up, we want to find a way to make things better for them."

But the 32-year-old did not come to this personal satisfaction with small-town life naturally. Like many young people who grow up in the rural Midwest, Patterson also had vague goals to "get out" and move on to a more exciting life.

But these early ideas were influenced by the fact that the nearest town to his childhood home was Falmouth. He attended Mays Elementary School and then middle school in Rushville before his parents moved to rural Franklin County. Patterson graduated from Franklin County High School in 1992. He said he knew when he was fairly young that he wanted to have a job in law enforcement.

"Well, it was either that or archeology," joked Patterson. "But I think I might have thought archeology then only because I could spell the word and my friends couldn't."

After his high school graduation, Patterson was accepted into the law enforcement program at Vincennes University. However, the day before his orientation at VU, one of his close friends died in a drowning accident. He decided against moving away at that time. A few months later, another friend encouraged him to go to Ball State University and he was admitted there to start the second semester. He studied criminology but found all the classes were too focused on statistics and hard facts. He increasingly became more involved in BSU's theater department and eventually would obtain a minor in theater upon college graduation.

Despite an interest in earning a living by landing parts in commercials, he decided the amount of time, luck and money needed just to get an interview for an acting spot was not for him. He instead pursued law enforcement. Shortly thereafter, he was hired by the Shirley Town Council, where two-thirds of its members were new to their responsibilities and had only recently promoted Michael Harrison as Town Marshal. With Harrison and Patterson, the Shirley's new council worked its first term undistracted by any problems with its police department. The two men were able to make many improvements to the department and build a solid reputation.

Patterson highlights his experience in Shirley where he was able to develop not only a rapport with the citizens but also gained additional training and certification and learned more about working within a government entity. He and Harrison were also given encouragement and help from Shirley's council to pursue grant money for new equipment and other department needs and appreciation for being involved in the community.

Certainly, most Shirley residents knew him in his police uniform, but many citizens there remember Patterson for other reasons. Some recalled him being easily beaten by a local teenage in a pizza-eating contest held during Shirley Founders Day. He opted out of the eating contest the next year and instead entered the Bake-Off contest and proved his baking skills were topnotch, winning the Best Cake award.

When Patterson announced his resignation there, Shirley council members regretfully accepted. He had been offered a position at nearby Knightstown, and though the salary and benefits were a little better, council knew he was mainly making the move to have the opportunity for time off. Because Shirley only has two fulltime officers, the Town Marshal and his deputy, both must always be on-call. Patterson had been finding it increasingly difficult to live with this aspect as his father was in failing health in Franklin County. His move to KPD allowed him some real time off from work to return to his parents' home to help. Patterson's father, Wayne E. Patterson, died just over three weeks ago.

He said he did not come to Knightstown with any intention of seeking to become the chief. He had always liked the town and all the people he had met.

"I already knew so many people from working in Shirley for five years. That made the transition pretty easy," he said.

Patterson was officially sworn in as Chief of Police at last Wednesday's meeting. He said he does not have any plans to make any big changes.

"I think we have a good process going right now," he said, adding he has already received positive support from the KPD officers. "But I'm definitely open to constructive criticism and open to suggestions on how we can improve."

He would also like to work more on seeking out grant money to upgrade equipment and for more training. "The money's out there if you can follow through on the process. This is 'free money' and allows us to get things we need without putting a burden on the taxpayers."

His enthusiasm for his new position began to show. "I don't have any aspirations to go anywhere. I realize I like the small-town community life."

No sooner had those words left his mouth then Patterson received a dispatch and the conversation with the new KPD chief was over.