

Tualatin Welcomes New Police Chief

Towards the end of last month, the City of Tualatin announced that Bill Steele had been selected to serve as Tualatin's new Chief of Police, following the retirement of Kent Barker. Chief Bill Steele's first day with the city was July 5th.



Tualatin Police Chief Bill Steele

Chief Steele comes to the City of Tualatin with 20 years of law enforcement and community leadership experience. He most recently served as the Chief Deputy with the Washington County Sheriff's Office, where he served over 575,000 residents

and managed nearly 600 employees. Starting with Washington County in 1996 as a Patrol Deputy, Chief Steele advanced his career through the department, serving in a number of roles including Patrol Lieutenant and Patrol Division Commander. In 2012, he also served as the interim Chief of Police with the City of Forest Grove.

"We are thrilled to have Chief Steele on board as the next leader of our Tualatin Police Department," said City Manager Sherilyn Lombos, "he brings a depth of experience, leadership, relationships and values that will serve Tualatin well into the future."

Tualatin Life publisher Michael Antonelli sat down for a one-on-one with our city's new Chief of Police, Bill Steele.

Tualatin Life: Hello Chief Steele. We are glad to have the opportunity to welcome you to Tualatin. A national search determined the best person to fill this position was already here in Washington County. Geographically this may not be a big move for you, but still it is quite a change to go from Chief Deputy - the number two position with the Washington County Sheriff's Office - to chief of police of



Captain Greg Pickering swearing in Bill Steele as Tualatin's Chief of Police.

the City of Tualatin. What do you see as the differences, and similarities, between policing the entire county, and focusing on our city?

Chief Steele: Washington County is truly unique. There is such a good working relationship between all the entities, whether it is the cities working with the county, or the police departments working together. So I see a lot of similarities between what I dealt with at the county in the Sheriff's Office, and what I'll be dealing with here in Tualatin - basically meeting the needs of the community, keeping people safe, and providing good customer service.

Tualatin Life: Something unique about Tualatin is it is not entirely in Washington County. Part of it is in Clackamas County, so not only do you have familiarity with Washington County, but also in dealing with Clackamas.

Chief Steele: Exactly. I think an advantage of working in Washington County is I know a lot of the counterparts in Clackamas County. Over the years I have developed some good working relationships. This is important not just between the counties, but also neighboring Police Departments. For us to be successful in Tualatin, we're going to need the assistance not only of Clackamas County, but Sherwood, and Tigard to the north. It's all intermixed.

Tualatin Life: Outgoing Tualatin Chief of Police Kent Barker, who recently retired, was very popular in the city. What is your assessment of the outgoing chief, and the Police Department you have inherited?

Chief Steele: I can only say good things about Kent Barker. Luckily, being somewhat in the local area, I have had the opportunity to know and work with him over the years. Throughout this (transition) process, he was very supportive of me, ensuring I had what I needed to be successful in my transition to the Tualatin Police Department.

I have joked with people that I should have been more careful of who I was replacing, as he is so respected in this community. He's definitely leaving big shoes to fill.

Tualatin Life: Chief Barker was very keen on community policing. Do you intend to continue the same level of focus on this aspect of serving the community?

Chief Steele: This has been a rough week for law enforcement. We've had some significant events that have occurred throughout the country, and while we might not experience some



of those issues in our community every single day, the support I've seen from the community has been overwhelming. We received phone calls, letters of appreciation, people dropping off doughnuts and pizza, or doing whatever they can to show their appreciation for what the members of this department do for them every day.

It's been a pretty good feeling to step into an environment like that, and so much of it comes down to community policing. It's a partnership between the Police Department and the community. We can't do it on our own. We need that connection. If the public understands what we deal with every day, and we have their support, we're going to be successful.

Tualatin Life: We realize you've only been chief of police since July 5. Based on what you are seeing, what policies do you intend to continue, and what, if any, do you intend to change or add?

Chief Steele: I was fortunate enough to transfer into a department that had great leadership, continues to have great leadership, and has great people working here. My job is to make decisions when they need to be made, but I don't see myself right now taking a lot of time to change policies. It's more understanding what the department is doing and making sure we are meeting expectations. Policy wise I don't see a lot of changes, because the department is running well.

Probably, a little later down the road, we will be able to make an adjustment here or there to figure out what might be a better way of doing something, to make sure we stay ahead of the times. If it's broken, fix it, but at this time it's not broken, so we just need to make sure it gets that tune up when it needs it.

Tualatin Life: You began your career in law enforcement 20 years ago as a patrol deputy, and worked your way up to the highest echelons of leadership in the Sheriff's Office. Your resume is impressive, and you obviously have hands-on experience at virtually every level of police work. How does your experience shape the way you work as a manager, not only over operations, but specifically with the officers under your command?

Chief Steele: When working as a manager, it really comes down to how you interact with people, and making sure they get what they need to be successful. It is important to set clear expectations of how we treat people, how we treat each other, and doing the right thing. We must make sure the community always comes first, and we are doing our part to ensure we serve them well. That comes from me.

Tualatin Life: We would like to give you the opportunity to address the people of your new city, Tualatin. What would you like to tell them, and what can they expect to see in the future from the Tualatin Police Department?

Chief Steele: Thank you. It's an honor for me to be your chief of police. It's not something I take lightly, so I'm going to do my best to make sure the Department's meeting your needs, and providing service at a high level. I want every interaction our folks have with community members to be a positive, memorable experience.

The support I've received has been wonderful; not only from Police Department staff, but city staff, and the community. That means a lot to me.

Tualatin Life: Thank you for your time, Chief Steele. We look forward to working with you in the future, and continuing our ongoing positive relationship with your department.