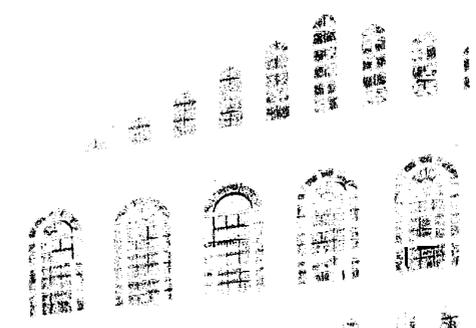


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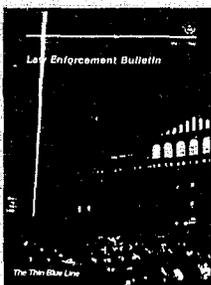
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**The Cover:** During a candlelight ceremony at the proposed site of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial, a crystal blue laser symbolizes the "thin blue line" of protection law enforcement officers provide. See page 24. Cover photo courtesy of Walter Gundy.

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# ***Police Retirement***

## *The Impact Of Change*



By  
JOHN M. VIOLANTI, Ph.D

**R**etirement is an important life event, bringing with it many adjustments and challenges. Changes in lifestyle, friendships, self-esteem, and vocation are all part of the process.

Retirement is especially difficult for police officers who leave the law enforcement profession at middle age, often unprepared for the consequences of change. However, by providing the necessary information to help them make crucial decisions before retirement, officers can make a smooth and productive transition into civilian life.

### **RETIREMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

There are five general areas that police officers should consider at the point of retirement:

- The rationale of a decision to retire
- The possible effects of retirement on officers and their families
- Locating other jobs or continuing education
- Developing appropriate job-seeking and/or educational skills
- Finding job placement assistance

### **Rationale of the Decision**

Perhaps the first concern is to determine why officers decide to retire. Individuals who work in policing for 20-25 years have invested much time and personal sacrifice, making the decision to "hang up the uniform" a difficult

one. Officers need to recognize, however, that there does come a time when that decision must be made.

Decisions on whether to remain in the profession depend on many factors. Some officers leave after 20-25 years of service to find new opportunities; others because of job stress, dissatisfaction, administrative problems, or discipline. Then there are those who stay because they like police work and cannot envision themselves doing anything else, while others stay because of financial burdens, comfort and security, fear of starting over, or because they have nothing else to do.

If officers decide to continue in policing, it should be for the obvious reasons—dedication, love of police work, or community spirit. To remain in police work for less acceptable reasons is psychologically unhealthy for the officers and unproductive for the department. If, on the other hand, officers decide to

retire, they should actively plan for the impact of change.

### **Effects of Retirement**

A second factor to consider is the effect that retirement may have on officers. The transition from public servant to private citizen can be difficult. There is a certain feeling of isolation when officers must clean out their lockers and "pack it in." Uniforms, firearms, and the most prized possession—the badge—must be relinquished. One officer described this process as "losing a part of my soul." These feelings are indicative of a cohesiveness among police officers that is not found in many other professions. When an officer leaves this environment, feelings of detachment and fear may develop.

An officer's family is also affected by retirement. One thing that is inevitable is the change in income; most departmental retirement plans provide a 50-percent pay for

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***The best way to deal  
with retirement is to  
prepare adequately.***  
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*Dr. Violanti is a member of the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine at the State University of New York in Buffalo, NY.*

retirees. Many will also experience a decrease in medical and dental benefits and an increase in insurance costs. Items like vacation pay, rank, seniority, and privileges will no longer be available.

Besides reduced income and benefits, the family must deal with a change in lifestyle. Police families must adjust to officers who do not

retirement in terms of income and developing alternative vocations. Senior officers frequently assumed administrative positions in other organizations, and line officers engaged in manual labor in some self-employed capacity. Approximately 25 percent performed some type of security work after retirement.

are available upon request from colleges.

### Seeking Another Job

Just knowing what kind of job one desires is not sufficient to get that job. Most individuals who seek a career change at middle age have inadequate job-seeking behaviors. They have not been in the job hunting market for a long time. Thus, a fourth area for officers to consider is to get training in the job-seeking process. Practical tasks like writing resumes, cover letters, filling out job applications, and interviewing techniques are helpful. Again, State job services provide training sessions in these areas. Also, local high schools may have evening adult programs designed to assist in gaining these important skills. If they are not available, libraries have many self-help books on applying for jobs.

### Job Placement

A fifth factor to consider is where to find job placement should individual job searches be unsuccessful. Generally, State and local employment services are best. These services have the resources and training available to help the individual find work, and they are free. Some people turn to private agencies for placement, but there may be a fee involved. If one feels more at ease with other police officers, a suggestion might be to start a job club. A group of officers can meet on a weekly basis and discuss their job-hunting efforts and resources among the group. Often, information is developed in such groups which is beneficial to individual members. The old adage that "many heads are better than one"

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***Always remember that police officers, with all their life experiences and skills, are valuable assets to the community.***

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find work and stay at home. If spouses are working, an ego conflict may arise between husband and wife. Perhaps children, most likely of college age, will have to find alternative sources to pay tuition and other costs. Also, mortgage, car, and other major expenses may have to be readjusted.

Thus, before an officer retires, the family should be involved in the decisionmaking process. By discussing these issues beforehand, a family can develop strategies to deal with them together.

### Other Employment or Continuing Education

A third consideration for retiring officers to consider is information about work and/or continuing education. Since most officers intend to work in some capacity after retirement, a major problem is finding another job. Forcese and Cooper<sup>1</sup> found that retired police officers do not have many occupational experiences other than policing. Few had carefully planned their

Since police officers have few vocational alternatives, it may be necessary to seek assistance in employment. State employment job services are available in most areas for this purpose. Services include aptitude and interest testing, ability testing, job listings, and job-seeking skills. There is a reference job guide called *The Dictionary of Occupational Titles*,<sup>2</sup> which gives a complete description of almost any type of occupation. This guide is available at any public library. Other sources for available jobs include newspapers, civil and Federal job information centers, journals, and contacts through friends and relatives.

As for continuing education, community colleges and universities generally do not require entrance tests for part-time adult students. Police officers are usually good students because of their life experiences. Many colleges offer credit for such experiences, as well as academic and vocational training. Catalogs of courses and activities

certainly applies here. This approach has been very successful in other occupational groups.

It is important to realize that status as an ex-police officer may affect a prospective employer's decision to hire. In the majority of cases, being a police officer is beneficial to the job applicant. There are some employers, however, who may be hesitant about hiring ex-police officers. They may have developed inaccurate stereotypes (most likely from television) of police officers as insensitive ruffians who could not possibly do anything else but be a "cop."

Officers should be aware of this apparent occupational prejudice. A good practice would be to determine beforehand if the employer has turned down officers in the past. This can be done by contacting other retirees from the department who may have applied for a position with the company in question. If employment is still desired, it may become necessary not to mention a previous police career but to list only experiences and transferable skills developed in that career. Fortunately, organizations who react this way to police officers are scarce.

Another possible area of discrimination is age. Employers may prefer younger employees and program their hiring practices toward such persons. The retiring police officer, who may be between 40-50 years of age, is at a disadvantage. Although Federal law prohibits discrimination on the basis of age, it is important to be aware that it does happen. Job applicants may legally be requested to give their ages, but the potential employer may not use

this information as a reason to not hire an applicant. If retired officers believe they have been discriminated against because of age, there is legal recourse available through the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) free of charge. Any person over the age of 40 is considered part of a protected class.

Retired police officers should not become discouraged when seeking another job. Often, it takes from 6 months to a year to find a job. In the meantime, continued association with police friends and the department offers a good source of support when times seem difficult. Always remember that police officers, with all their life experiences and skills, are valuable assets to the community.

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**Retirement can  
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#### THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT

For the good of the department, as well as the individual officer, provisions should be made for a retirement counseling/career guidance training program. The program should include resources from the community that will assist officers through the retirement process. Topics might include retirement benefits, insurance, job-seeking techniques, psychology of retirement, and financial management. If resources are available, a

job resource bank and placement center could be developed within the department. Through contact efforts of a placement officer, retiring officers would have a listing of jobs available in the community.

Departments will profit from such a program. Many are employing officers who are there simply because they do not know how or when to leave. With departmental guidance to help these officers make a decision, this problem can be reduced substantially.

#### CONCLUSION

Although retirement is often considered by police officers as a final reward, careful consideration must be given to its consequences. The best way to deal with retirement is to prepare adequately. Plan for both good and bad experiences. For those who have served their community well, retirement and possibly a new career are well-deserved. Retirement can certainly be the best part of a police officer's life, if one is properly and systematically prepared for the change. **LEB**

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> D. Forbese and J. Cooper, "Police Retirement Career Succession or Obsolescence," *Canadian Police College Journal*, vol. 9, 1985, pp. 413-424.

<sup>2</sup> *The Dictionary of Occupational Titles* is a collection of job descriptions in the United States. It is useful in determining the qualifications, requirements, and description of occupations.

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*For additional information on retirement counseling and career guidance training, contact the author at the Department of Social and Prevention Medicine, State University of New York at Buffalo, 2211 Main Street, Buffalo, NY 14214.*

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