

CHIEF PHIL COTTEN

YEARS OF SERVICE | 1973-2011

This month, we reflect on the work and many innovations of Chief Phil Cotten, the 16th and longest serving Chief of Police for the Norman Police Department, during his 38 year tenure.

Chief Phil Cotten has deep roots to the City of Norman. Cotten moved to the City of Norman in the 8th grade and graduated from Norman High School in 1967. Other than being deployed during his active duty service in the United States Army from 1969-1971, Cotten has been a full-time resident of Norman. Cotten graduated from the University of Oklahoma in 1975.

COTTEN'S START IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

After leaving the military, Cotten was in need of employment to support his family financially. He learned that University of Oklahoma Police Department was hiring. Cotten became an officer for OUPD in November of 1971. In Spring of 1973, he interviewed for a sergeant position at OUPD. Cotten was successful and promoted to sergeant at OUPD. One of the members of the promotion board was Don Holyfield, a captain with the Norman Police Department. Holyfield inquired about Cotten numerous times over the following months. This prompted him to apply to NPD.

COTTEN'S TENURE AT NPD

Cotten began his career with NPD on September 1, 1973. He was a graduate of the Norman Police Department's 11th Police Academy and became a commissioned NPD officer on November 14, 1973.

Cotten began his NPD career like most officers, working patrol. As a rookie officer, he was assigned to the Campus Corner area of the city as a foot patrol officer. A normal foot patrol was 9:30 p.m. to 2:30 a.m. After finishing his foot patrol assignment, Cotten would routinely ride with a partner in a patrol vehicle until the end of his patrol shift at 5:30 a.m. He became a police detective in 1977, working Tuesday through Saturday from 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. Cotten investigated a variety of crimes while working as a detective.

Cotten was promoted to Sergeant, a first line supervisor, after a few years as a detective. As a sergeant, he worked as the Headquarters Supervisor over Dispatch and Records as well as a Patrol Supervisor.

Cotten was promoted to Lieutenant in 1982. He spent three to four months in the Planning and Research Division before being assigned to Night Shift Patrol as the Shift Commander. Cotten spent four years in this position. He also supervised the Special Weapons and Tactics team for three years during this time.



"CHIEF COTTEN MODELED PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND PROBLEM SOLVING WITH COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS."

- JD Younger,
Edmond Chief of Police
Retired Norman Police Major





Cotten was promoted to Captain in 1988. As a captain, he spent time as a Patrol Captain, Staff Services Captain, and the Captain over Investigations. He was able to attend the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) National Academy from April 7, 1991 to June 23, 1991.

COTTEN'S TENURE AS CHIEF

On April 12, 1996 Cotten was named Chief of Police. He is the longest serving Chief of Police in the history of NPD. Cotten served as Chief of Police until his retirement on May 20, 2011. While Chief of Police, Cotten introduced a Forensic Artist position, Forensic Video Analyst position, and a Forensic Computer Analyst position. Cotten also added a Drug Interdiction Team to the department and helped advance crime scene processing, digital evidence analysis and a fingerprint comparison database.

Besides Cotten's police service, he has been involved in the Norman Rotary Club since 1988 and the Salvation Army Advisory Council since 1993. Cotten also has spent time as a board member for the Women's Resource Center, Youth and Family Center, Red Cross, Norman Crime Stoppers, Norman Chamber of Commerce, and the Norman Regional Hospital Foundation.

COTTEN'S CONTINUED LEGACY

Cotten was appointed by Oklahoma Governor Brad Henry to the Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Commission, where he served seven years. Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallon appointed him to the Supreme Courts Dispute Resolution Board, where he served three years. Governor Fallon also appointed him to the Board of Dentistry in 2012. Cotten was reappointed by Governor Kevin Stitt in 2018 and is still serving as a board member today.

On December 13, 2014, Cotten was inducted into the Oklahoma Law Enforcement Hall of Fame. He expressed his favorite memories are primarily about the many men and women he worked with over his 38-year career. When Cotten retired in 2011, every supervisor in their current position had been promoted by him. Cotten stated he "was able to promote some outstanding leaders." He also explained some of his favorite memories are of the conferences he was able to attend during his career. Another achievement Cotten is proud of is attending the FBI National Academy. During this academy, he was able to gain knowledge about the concepts of Community Oriented Policing and brought that information back to NPD. In fact, in 1992, he actually taught the concepts to every member of the department, both officers and civilians.



Cotten is still a resident of Norman and he continues his life of service in retirement. Cotten is currently still an active member of the Norman Rotary Club, as well as a board member for the Cleveland County Salvation Army, the Norman Crime Stoppers, and the Oklahoma State Board of Dentistry. He is a life member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the Oklahoma Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP). Lastly, Cotten has been a member of the FBI National Academy Association for 30 years.



11th POLICE TRAINING ACADEMY
NORMAN, OKLAHOMA-----SEP. 3,---NOV. 14, 1973

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|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| FIRST ROW | SECOND ROW | THIRD ROW |
| LT. BOYCE GRISBOM | PATROLMAN PHILIP T. PARKER | PATROLMAN JOHN WALKER |
| DET. P. KAWATKA WOOD | PATROLMAN THOMAS LOONEY | PATROLMAN PATRICK A. LOFFMAN |
| MAJOR DON F. SULLYFIELD | PATROLMAN PAUL COTTEN | PATROLMAN ROBERT W. JUDY |
| LT. BOYCE G. WEDDLE | PATROLMAN DEAN KANILLARIS | PATROLMAN JOE WASHINGTON |
| | PATROLMAN DAVID W. ST JOHN | PATROLMAN BRADY S. DRABERAN |

“THERE WAS NOBODY BETTER AT BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS THAN CHIEF COTTEN, AND THROUGH THOSE CONNECTIONS OUR DEPARTMENT GREW. WITHOUT TRYING, HE KEPT US FOCUSED ON SERVING THE COMMUNITY INSTEAD OF OURSELVES. NOBODY COULD QUESTION HIS COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS, OR PUBLIC SERVICE.”

- John Stege, Retired Norman Police Sgt.



WORDS FROM THOSE WHO WORKED ALONGSIDE CHIEF COTTEN

RETIRED NORMAN POLICE DETECTIVE | COREY LAMBRECHT

Norman Police Department experienced an explosion of technology under Chief Cotten's leadership. Computers were brought into the report writing room - and into our patrol cars, making our jobs much more efficient. The transition to modern radio technology, records management software, dispatch CAD, evidence management, interview room recording equipment and much more occurred under his watch. The evolution from analog to the digital affected all of us in positive ways. Chief Cotten embraced the modern era of policing and provided the budget and people to make it happen.

EDMOND CHIEF OF POLICE | JD YOUNGER

The list of people responsible for Norman PD adopting a community policing philosophy may vary, but it would be incomplete if it did not include retired Police Chief Phil Cotten. Chief Cotten was the Captain of Patrol in 1993 when the City of Norman was awarded a United States Department of Justice grant to fund eight Patrol Officer positions in support of NPD's adoption of a community policing philosophy. From July 5, 1994 when those eight officers joined three others to form the 30th Norman Police Academy through Chief Cotten's appointment as Chief in 1996 and until his retirement in 2011, Norman's community policing efforts and Chief Cotten could not be separated. Chief Cotten modeled partnerships with the community members and problem solving with community stakeholders. While Chief Cotten would be the first to point the spotlight at the numerous Department members that implemented and championed community policing during his tenure, it was his consistent support and encouragement that provided so many opportunities for others to be successful.

RETIRED NORMAN POLICE SGT | JOHN STEGE

I enjoyed working for Chief Cotten. He is a very positive person who always seemed to have nice things to say about others. That positivity was infectious, and was probably a result of his remarkable gift for remembering faces, names, and personal details about EVERYBODY he ever met. He met my oldest son, for example, when I first started working here in 1994. Working various shifts and being new to town, my family rarely had reason to make a presence at the PD. However, each year when Adam would sell popcorn for Boy Scouts, Chief Cotten not only took the time to talk with Adam and Marie - making them feel welcome - but he would also share some highlight of a previous meeting with them that showed he remembered them specifically.

This gift was his greatest contribution to the department. Although not perfect, our agency has been blessed with a culture of hiring people of high quality who have a deep desire to serve the community, to make our city a better place to live for everyone. Chief Cotten empowered each of us to make a difference every day. In fact, he relied upon us to make a difference. He focused on connecting with the community. Without thinking, Chief Cotten had a tremendous network of community partnerships including council members, city staff members, business and religious leaders, you know, the usual folks. But, he also connected with anybody he had ever met and their family members. If he had met you, he remembered you, and he would take your call. No matter who you were, you had direct access to the Chief of Police. There was nobody better at building partnerships than Chief Cotten, and through those connections our department grew. Without trying, he kept us focused on serving the community instead of ourselves. Nobody could question his commitment to community engagement, building partnerships, or public service.

NORMAN POLICE DEPUTY CHIEF | RICKY JACKSON

Chief Cotten was a Lieutenant when I began my career with the Norman Police Department in 1986. I was assigned to the Criminal Investigations Division in 1990, and Chief Cotten was the Captain over the bureau. I found him to be friendly, engaging and easy to talk to. We had many discussions over the years in regards to family, culture and the profession. He's consistently reached out over the years, inquiring on the wife, kids and grandkids. He was a friend and a mentor when we worked as co-workers, and he has continued to be a friend and mentor long after leaving the police department.