

CHEYENNE HERALD

FREE - TAKE ONE

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Cheyenne's new police chief

Brian Kozak is his name.

He has been in law enforcement for more than 25 years and most recently was police chief of Avon, Colorado with a uniformed complement of fewer than 20.

I have no problem calling him "Chief."

I could not afford that same respect to his predecessor. I'll remind you why in the next issue. This is about the new Chief.

When I heard Brian Kozak had been chosen over two internal officers, I did some background work on him. I found no controversy. I found nothing negative. What I found was that he had expertise that can be beneficial here in Cheyenne as our sleepy little town morphs into a tiny little city with increasing big city problems.

His more than two decades of experience in a major city also allowed Cheyenne to hire a chief who learned and gained experience on another city's nickel. Those whose careers have been spent in Cheyenne (at the mid-level or higher) know only what a police chief in Cheyenne knows and that can be precious little compared to a guy who comes from a police department with 900 uniformed officers.

I also found that the guy mixed with residents. And that he had an advanced education that was impressive and legitimate, even if in fields a bit puzzling until I had a chance to speak with him about them.

When we last communicated, I had e-mailed him to cancel an interview I had scheduled with him for January 15 because my course back to Cheyenne from a vacation trip to Las Vegas changed upon the death of my mother-in-law. We had been communicating by e-mail and I sent one to him early the morning we got the news of her passing and told him I would travel a different route home and had to cancel our interview. He expressed condolences and wrote, "I will be sure to get with you when I get to Cheyenne."

That was a comment I didn't put total stock in. I figured when he arrived here and told anyone else in the CPD that he was going to meet with me, they'd tell him how hard I was on Bob Fecht and he would likely forget his promise.

He didn't.

I didn't call him right away to arrange an interview after he began work here on March 1 because I thought he could better use the time to get settled. But, early last week, he had Mark Munari call to set up the meeting - an interview if you will.

His action told me a few things about the man. First, he's a man of his word. Not that meeting with me was a big deal for either of us - in the grand scheme of things. But, by God, he said he would and he did. The other thing is that, if others in the department advised him against meeting me, he did what he thought was right. And he should not fear me. I am a law and order kind of person and respect those who carry a badge and gun. But, as Bob Fecht learned, I do not fear them.

So, we met.

In a taped session with the new Chief, I learned considerably more about his experience, his past, his ambition, and even his beginning, which I'll share with readers.

Because he'd spent so much time in Mesa, Arizona, I assumed he was probably born and raised nearby. When I asked him that question, his answer surprised me. Really surprised me.

"I was born in Duluth," he answered. "Duluth, Minnesota."

I know where Duluth is. It's about 60 miles due north of where I was born and lived until after high school. And Duluth tests the mettle of any man. Or woman. Built on a hillside and on Lake Superior, it is a tough climate. It is also the largest city between the Twin Cities and Canada. In fact, I had planned to locate a retail catalog showroom near Duluth, in a little town called Hermantown, until the economics of Jimmy Carter set in and pushed interest rates higher than the contractor could deliver the building to me for the price we had agreed upon. Duluth had declared a building moratorium on the "hill" because water was cascading onto those below every time it rained - such are the effects of paving over and building on all ground.

The new Chief didn't live in Duluth too long. But having that city on your birth certificate says things to me and they're generally favorable and positive.

So, Rick and the selection team found a

guy born in Minnesota to take over the local police department. I support that.

I wasn't trying to trace his childhood and we shifted to law enforcement experience.

Let me interject here that Brian Kozak doesn't come across as full of himself. He never left the impression that he had worked in a department 10 times larger than Cheyenne so he had all the answers. He has a quiet self-confidence but not an offensive swagger that carrying a gun often brings to someone.

He has also said recently that he would take a little time getting acquainted with the department and its personnel before he made any significant changes. That is always the best way, the most productive way, to take over a new business or, in his case, a new police department.

Brian was the ninth and last child born in his family and his mother died of leukemia shortly after his birth. Neighbors, who were good friends of the family, adopted Brian soon after his birth and he considers himself very lucky for that good fortune. His father was the victim of an industrial accident and became institutionalized, unable to care for the eight older sibling and they were put into foster care.

He went through school in Arizona, became an Eagle Scout, leading into becoming a Police Explorer for four years and from that experience, he became a cop in Mesa - one year after his high school graduation. He started as an animal control officer so he could get his foot in the door to become a police officer. As soon as he turned 21, he attended the police academy and became a police officer. His career in Mesa was varied. He was a field training officer, he "got into motors," and was a DUI cop on a motorcycle for about five years, during which he was named DUI Officer for the Phoenix Region three different years. He

arrested over 1700 people for DUI when he was a "motor cop" with the Mesa PD.

He also became a drug recognition expert and instructor in that field and has traveled all over the country teaching fellow officers how to recognize symptoms of drug impairment. That led to teaching teachers in schools, parents and business owners how to recognize drug usage and type. It seems an incredibly useful tool.

He served as a Patrol Sgt and had experience in hiring and recruiting, as well as doing background investigations on potential hires. He taught at the police academy - Mesa PD hired about 80 new officers a year. In their 1,400 member force, 900 were uniformed.

The new Chief holds two degrees. He recognized that further education would benefit him in the police department and beyond. His bachelor's degree is in Business Administration and his master's degree is in Education. His plan had been to become a teacher when he retired from the Mesa PD. He worked for about twenty years at an inner city high school in Phoenix while he was also a police officer.

He was a Lieutenant when he earned his Master's from the University of Phoenix. He worked the graveyard shift on the street, then went to the high school to teach, get a few hours sleep and then start the cycle all over again.

He was careful to point out that his education at UOP was "all ground classes." "I didn't do anything over the internet."

I'll pick up on this story in the next issue. I was interested in why he left the Mesa police department, huge in comparison, to become police chief of the small mountain town of Avon and then why he sought out the Cheyenne position. What changed his plans to retire after 25 years with the Mesa PD and become a teacher?

PLEASE CONTACT ME

I need the person with whom I met a month ago at the downtown Village Inn to call or e-mail me. Our discussion was regarding the Jessica Venable case. Your contact information inadvertently was erased from my telephone. My contact information is at the bottom of each page.

Dave Featherly

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