

Police Chief, Wife Display Can-Do Attitude

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By Dana Farrar -

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Police Chief Art Miller, and his wife, Linda, gave two views of police work during their talks at a meeting of Women Involved in South Pasadena Political Action (WISPPA) last Saturday. But both showed that they are determined and creative problem-solvers.

Linda Miller reminisced about their courtship and 34-year marriage, focusing on how the couple stayed connected despite their erratic schedules.

In the beginning, when her husband was undercover as a high school student and she was a beginning teacher, she believed he was indestructible. "I didn't worry about his safety much," she said.

Before cellphones, it was harder to keep in touch, but the Millers made creative use of a small tape recorder, leaving each other voice memos and songs leading into "honey-dos." "Every song had to be really short because neither of us could sing," she joked.

There were more anecdotes than Linda Miller could share, of course. Some, like a ride-along that brought her to two murder scenes, were not so pleasant. "There are so many stories. The good stories are what keep Art and me going," she said, noting how proud she was that her husband and his department were able to help prevent a mass shooting at South Pasadena High School in 2014. "With me by his side, we make a great team."

Chief Art Miller then spoke about his experiences taking over the department four years ago. Although he had been warned there would be challenges, he said he was surprised at how disconnected the force was. "The Police Department was very insular and never or seldom reached out to the community or other agencies. That vocabulary wasn't even in our police department," he said.

He recalled taking up the serious issues of care and patient population at South Pasadena Convalescent Hospital during his second week on the job in an attempt to be proactive rather than reactive. But, because of an FBI investigation, his hands were tied for some time, which he said caused him a lot of frustration. In the end, Chief Miller was able to effect real change, and the revamped and reopened facility is now one of many points of pride for him and our city.

"Our department is a catch-all for things, as opposed to a larger agency. To create a new culture within our Police Department is to become a can-do Police Department. We never say no," Chief Miller explained. Rather than transferring a caller who needs help to a potential trail of various city departments, "if you call us, even if it doesn't fall under our purview, we will make all the calls to get the answer for you. We're small, but we do big things."

Some of his accomplishments include providing self-defense classes for more than 240 women and teens, a medical first responder program that has saved at least three lives and become a model for other departments in the area, a mental illness response team, revamping the crossing guard program for schools, and a drug interdiction program with several other cities.

But sometimes the small things mean the most. For example, the chief told about a homeless man in the city who calls himself Cowboy. The man had told an outreach worker that he needed more protein, and so a large jar of peanut butter was left for him. The chief received a thank you note written on a paper bag saying that this gift was Cowboy's "childhood dream come true."

Officers also regularly hand out kits that include clean socks, toiletries and rain slickers through a program with Holy Family Church. And "that's the kind of relationship I want our officers to have," he added.

The department also is upgrading technology with a new online reporting system for extra patrols and uses predictive policing to help keep citizens safe. Dispatch is being revamped and there will soon be an automated parking vending machine that accepts credit cards in the department's lobby.

When it comes to making improvements or solving problems, Miller describes himself as a man of action. "We will get it done," he said. "Sometimes it won't look pretty, but we're always moving forward."

The next meeting of WISPPA will be Feb. 4 at 8:30 a.m. at Calvary Presbyterian Church.