

# Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

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## “Captain Leon Chapman Retires After 41 Years on Police Force”

When Police Captain Leon Chapman started working as a patrol officer with the City of Norfolk Police Department 41 years ago, there were no handheld radios, no cell phones, no Tasers. There wasn't even any actual fire arms training until the trainee went to the law enforcement academy later on in the job. Chapman recently reminisced about his years of service as he looks to retirement in October.

“The first day on the job I sat down with then Assistant Chief Dennis Lauver who gave me policies and procedures to read. The next night I was assigned to the night shift and told to ‘go out, drive around and learn the city’ by myself in a patrol car,” Chapman said.



Chapman remembers clearly his first night on duty in 1972- a car ahead of him was weaving back and forth in the lanes, almost hitting a corner of the police station that was then located on Norfolk Avenue near where Prengers Restaurant is now. He stopped the driver, told him to get out of the car subsequently grabbing the obviously drunk driver's belt and kicking his feet to spread them out- a technique he'd learned in a law enforcement class in college. Both the driver and Chapman ended up down on the concrete with then Captain Mike Calhoun watching the entire scene.

“I remember thinking ‘I'm in trouble now,’” Chapman said. He wasn't. The driver was

booked for drunk driving and Chapman went on to patrol for two years before becoming an Investigator in 1974, a Detective Sergeant in 1983 and then Police Captain since 1984.

Chapman was born and raised in Lincoln and was familiar with the Norfolk area as his father grew up on a farm near Wee Town north of Norfolk. Chapman attended what was previously Milford Trade School then served at the Naval Air Facility in Naples, Italy during the Vietnam War for four years as a jet engine mechanic.

He took up Criminal Justice at Northeast Community College staying with his grandparents on the farm and working part time at Lou's Thrifty Way grocery store. He was hired after one semester by then Norfolk Police Chief Jim Brenneman.

Chapman has been on the police force through some of the worst crimes in Norfolk including the Stella Alvarez case when a mother killed her three children; the five bank homicides; and the Robert Hunt murder of a young Norfolk woman.

"It was difficult to listen to him (Hunt) tell the details of such a heinous crime," said Chapman, who was assigned the job of interrogating him.

Chapman said it was also difficult to go to the homes of families who had lost a baby to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

"I had children the same age. It was hard to do those kind of calls," Chapman said.

Back then, Chapman said, there were very few domestic assaults that were reported as it was considered a "family matter" and no one would call the police.

Chapman remembered answering one call when the wife was lying on the floor beat up and bleeding and the drunk husband asked Chapman if he wanted a beer.

"I was so mad I called for another officer. I told him I am too angry to handle this guy so I got the rescue unit for the wife and a safe place for the child while another officer took him in," Chapman said.

Through the years, Chapman and his wife, Cindy, learned to deal with the stress of Chapman working in law enforcement.

"In the early 80's a state patrolman asked us if we wanted to learn how to square dance. My wife responded, 'you won't catch me dead in one of those dresses' but we went and ended up square dancing for 25 years. We socialized with a lot of good people. We had forgotten there were really decent people out there because I would mostly only deal with the dark side of the community," Chapman said. He said he has encouraged officers through the years to do some sort of activity outside of law enforcement.

Chapman helped with the design of the new police facility on 7<sup>th</sup> Street and remembers using the indoor gun range in the basement of the old facility and housing prisoners there in the six jail cells with bars.

Chapman said his family didn't always appreciate him working at the police department with rotating night shifts every two weeks but made it work.

"We would do a lot of family stuff, a lot of camping and we always took the kids' friends along," Chapman said.

The Chapmans' son, Ryan, and daughter, Mindy, both live and work in Norfolk with Mindy mother of the "two greatest grandkids in the world."

Chapman won't have to investigate crimes after October 1, his official retirement date. Instead he'll have bears to contend with as he will spend his first two weeks of retirement hunting bear with his brother in Arkansas.

"I am glad that I stayed with the City of Norfolk and had the opportunity to raise my children in this community. The City has been a great employer and I would not trade these years and experience for anything. We'll stay here the rest of our lives. Norfolk is our home," Chapman said.

Don Miller will be replacing Leon Chapman as the Captain of Operations of the Norfolk Police Division. Miller is originally from New Ulm, Minnesota. He attended the University of Nebraska at Omaha before completing an Associates Degree in law enforcement at Northeast Community College. He was hired as a patrol officer with the City of Norfolk in 1990. After three years he became a Detective and then three years later became a Corporal before being promoted to Sergeant in 1999. He was a member of the original Norfolk Tactical Team that was formed in 1995 and served as its Commander from 1997 to 2009. Miller graduated from the School of Police Staff and Command from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois in 2008.

Ted McCarthy was recently promoted from Sergeant at the City of Norfolk Police Department to Detective. McCarthy has been with the Norfolk Police since 1990. He has worked as an Investigator since 1999. He graduated from Norfolk Catholic High School and took two years of business classes at Northeast Community College.