

Chief Walpole recalls 20 years in Scotts Valley

By DENISE FRANKLIN
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SCOTTS VALLEY — On one of Police Chief Steve Walpole's first calls after he joined the police force in 1972, he killed a 246-pound suspect.

The head of that suspect, a wild boar, hangs on the wall in Walpole's office. It is a symbol of his tenacity as a police officer, as well as his sense of humor.

Today, friends of the chief will celebrate his 20-year anniversary on the force with a lunch at City Hall. In those two decades, the 43-year-old Walpole has worked his way up the ranks and even acted for a short time as city manager last year.

The story of the wild boar is one Walpole obviously enjoyed relating as he sat back in his office this week, flipping through scrapbooks from his career.

The boar was loose in town, killing dogs and damaging property. Former Police Chief Gerald Pittenger warned his four-man crew back in 1972 not to shoot the boar because if it were wounded, it could turn on an officer.

One night on the graveyard shift, Walpole got a call from the Rev. Joseph Leonard of San Agustin Church, who said a wild boar was attacking the church's chicken shed.

"When I got there, it was frothing and everything," Walpole related. "But the priest said, 'Go get him. God's with you.'"

While the priest held a flashlight on the boar, Walpole jumped on top of the chicken hut. "He was ramming it. He was very close. I had a .357 revolver and I put a hollow point bullet in it and fired. He didn't even flinch, but I saw some blood."

Walpole chased the boar in his car through the field. "It had run until it pumped all its blood out. The bullet took out half its lung and heart. But even though I thought it was dead, I didn't want

to get out of the car."

Walpole drove down to Denny's restaurant, where Pittenger was having coffee. "I threw my badge down in front of him and said, 'I shot the pig and killed it.' He threw the badge back at me and said, 'You're lucky.'"

Besides taking out wild boars, Walpole has gone under cover to arrest a ring of thieves selling stolen cars, has been involved in at least six incidents where shots have been fired, and once arrested a carload of bank robbers he had stopped because the tail light of their car was out.

Walpole said it was Pittenger who kept him on at the department all those years.

"Our personalities were so different that we balanced each other out. He was introverted and I was extroverted.

"He survived here 20 years and had a way of resolving issues that made both sides feel good. I learned a lot from him. He had a way of depersonalizing conflict and focusing on issues."

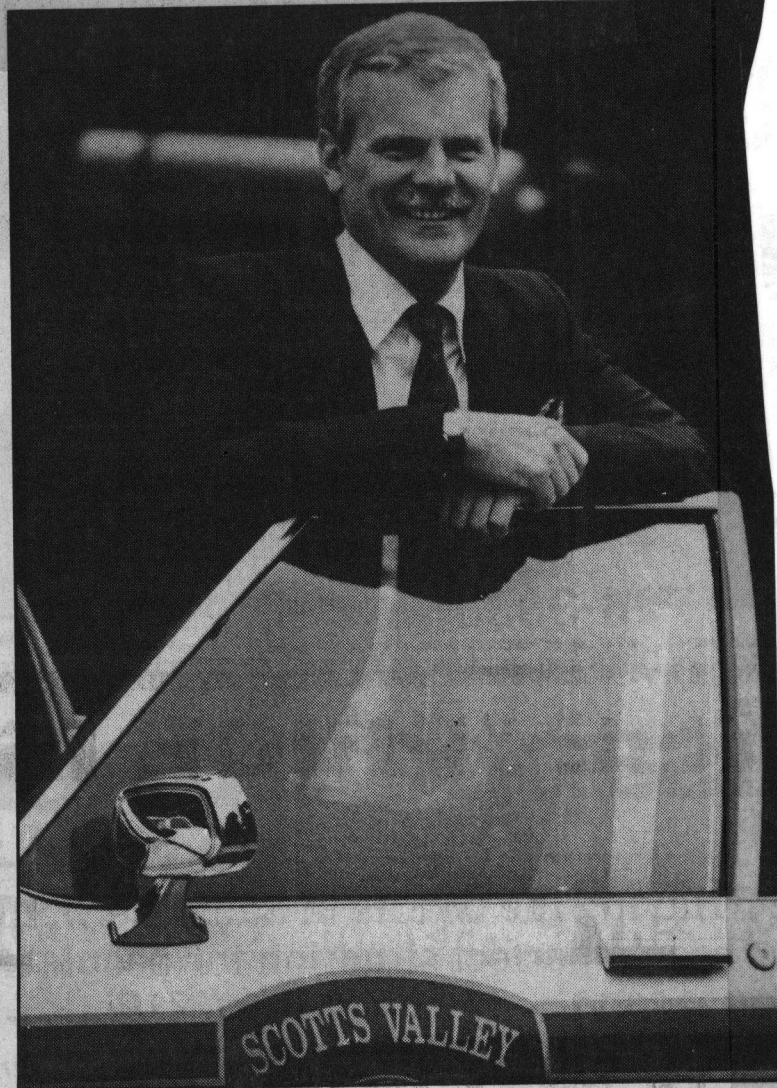
Walpole said he never intended to stay in Scotts Valley, let alone become police chief.

Married at age 18 and an administration of justice student at Cabrillo College, Walpole said he wanted to get some experience as a reserve officer "before going somewhere like San Jose Police Department where the pay was better."

When a police position came up, Walpole said he needed money and decided to take it, but decided he would stay only a year.

Wife Sandy, a librarian at Vine Hill School, said the decision to pursue police work surprised her. "When we first got married, his big thing when he was in college was that he was going to be an accountant," she said.

Walpole didn't think he'd get a job after interviewing with Pittenger, who immediately remembered giving him a speeding ticket. On top of that, when Pittenger



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Police Chief Steve Walpole says he loves his town.

asked Walpole what his goals were, "I told him, 'I plan to take your place some day, sir.' Then I thought, 'Why did I say that?'"

In 1986, Walpole was named chief of police upon Pittenger's retirement.

It doesn't surprise his colleagues that he's made it to the top.

"He works too hard," said Capt. Tom Bush, who had been with the department 19 years. "He is probably one of the hardest working individuals I know. ... He shows up on weekends, and on his vacations he comes by just to make sure everything is going right."

Sgt. Bill Smith, who said Walpole got him interested in the department more than 19 years ago when he was a student at Cabrillo, also called his boss "a workaholic."

"But he is really a dynamic in-

dividual," Smith added. "Probably the biggest thing that makes him a good leader is the fact that he cares about the people who are under him. Lately, though, he seems to wish he was back in patrol because he keeps interfering with our stuff."

Just Thursday, Walpole could be found out on the streets directing traffic during a fire. Putting on a uniform and getting out in the field is all part of the work in a small department that Walpole says he loves.

He admits he has had other job offers with more money, but has turned them down because he loves Scotts Valley, a town where he and his wife have raised two sons.

"His love is the city," said Smith. "He has always loved the city. Probably the smartest thing the city ever did was when they made him chief. He fit the bill."