

WATSONVILLE
HISTORY
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Police chief leaves laughing

Big crowd wishes him well

By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

Ray Belgard was serious about his work as Watsonville police chief, but he also knew when a little levity was OK — and it was in that vein that 400 people roasted and toasted him at his retirement dinner last night at the Holiday Inn in Santa Cruz.

"Welcome to the second annual Ray Belgard retirement dinner," acting police chief Terry Medina said to begin the event. He was referring to a dinner held for Belgard when he left the Santa Cruz district attorney's office as chief investigator in 1982 to take the job in Watsonville, his hometown.

On Dec. 31, Belgard, 58, completed a 34-year career that started in the Salinas Police Department and led to the district attorney's offices in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties, and finally to Watsonville.

The politicians and law enforcement people who paraded to the microphone for two hours kidded Belgard about everything from his golf swing to his multiple retirements, but they also had some strong praise.

"He really turned the department around," said City Manager John Radin, acknowledging that morale among police officers was down before Belgard was hired. "We've got a well-rounded, well-educated department that's second to none in the county."

Belgard mentioned several months ago that he might go into politics in the future, and several speakers brought that up.

"Whether it's Mr. Belgard, Mr. Senator, or Mr. Supervisor, you'll always be Chief to us," said Capt. Chuck Carter of the Watsonville Police Department.

"When I grow up I want to

be just like you," said Capt. Steve Ellis, commander of the Highway Patrol in Santa Cruz County.

Medina, who worked under Belgard at the district attorney's office and in Watsonville, turned serious when he said Belgard was "special because he's a people person."

"He has extended a hand to everyone in this room," Medina said, "and I assure you he's that way with the citizens."

When Belgard told him "your three minutes are up," Medina said, "and I love you." Then he gave his boss a hug.

Most of the speakers dispensed quickly with the compliments and spent most of their time needling Belgard, who has never been accused of not being able to take a joke or dish one out.

"We tracked down Ray's original duty weapon," said Stony Brook of the district attorney's office. He paused,

then, and to the delight of the crowd, pulled out a large sword.

When District Attorney Art Danner announced a painting was being commissioned of Belgard's choice, he told the chief, "You'll probably want it of yourself."

"Big," Belgard responded.

Watsonville police Lt. Mickey Aluffi told Belgard his gift was a \$1,300 chipper-shredder for yard work, "and can I borrow it next weekend?"

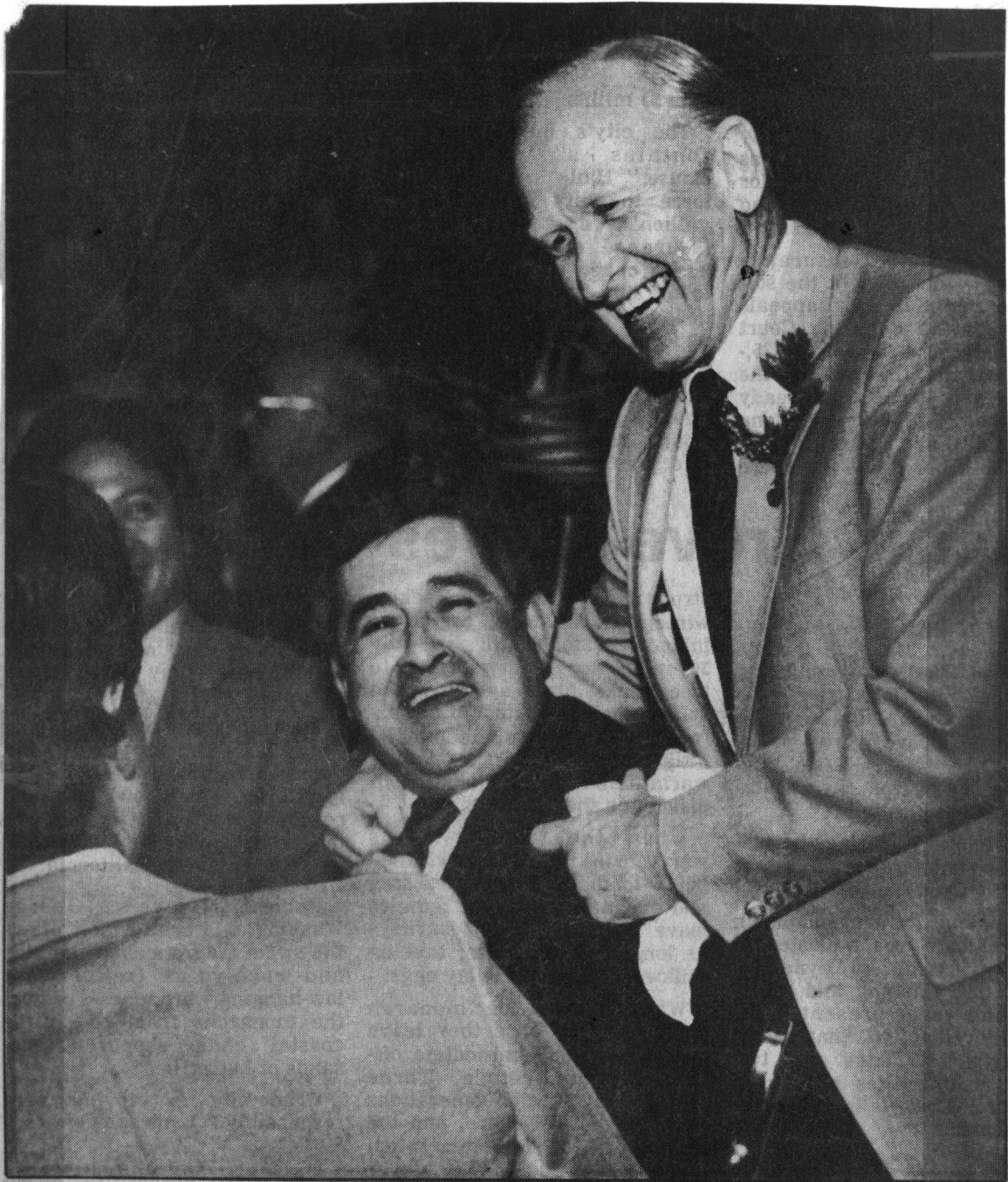
Former Watsonville Mayor Ann Soldo called Belgard "the sexiest police chief I've met."

Another former mayor, Bill Johnston, joked that Belgard's retirement was forced because police dog Donn has become so proficient at doing "all the dirty work."

Among the awards presented to Belgard was a "personal" message from President and Mrs. Reagan.

To former county supervisor Marilyn Liddcoat, who is going to the inauguration next week, Belgard said, "If Ronnie is at the inauguration, tell him thanks ... from one lame duck to another."

Belgard ended the evening by telling the people that although he was making light of the activities, "I'm deeply moved. We'll just do it again pretty soon."



Chip Scheuer

Ray Belgard, standing, jokes with Tony Rodriguez, chief investigator at the Monterey County district attorney's office.