

# Ken Kegg Has Seen 29 Years Of Change In Sheriff's Office

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The year was 1949. Harry S. Truman was president. World War II had been over for four years and civil rights reforms were beginning to attract national attention.

It was also the year that 25-year-old Ken Kegg joined the Santa Cruz Sheriff's Department.

This month, Kegg will spend his last day with the department. He is retiring after 29 years as a cop. They have been good and bad years, but mostly they have been years of change.

When Kegg first came to work, the Sheriff's Department didn't even have matching patrol cars. Their four 1946 Chevrolets were red, blue, black and gray.

There were 10 men in the department, including the sheriff.

At any one time there were only two deputies to patrol the entire county and if there was an emergency call in the far reaches of the county, it could take up to one hour for a deputy to arrive on the scene.

And to top it off, deputies had to buy their own uniforms and equipment at a cost of more than \$200. That wasn't so bad, except deputies only made \$187 per month, said Kegg with a grin.

But those were good years — years before Kegg would be called on to investigate the area's mass murders or face rioting students in Berkeley and San Francisco State.

Born in Santa Cruz in 1924, Kegg was raised by a plumber father who wanted his son to follow in the trade. But one broken nose and a lot of mistakes later, Kegg dropped the plumbing profession to join the Navy. For four years he served in the South Pacific in naval intelligence, then returned home to work in an appliance manufacturing company.

In May 1949, he grew tired of

the appliance business and became a deputy sheriff. "I didn't get paid for my first two weeks of work. That should have been my first clue," he laughed.

Staff was so thin at the time that one man had to be the dispatcher, desk clerk, jailer and watchdog. He not only booked incoming prisoners, but took them to their cells, stopped fights, watched over them when they were sick and fed them their meals.

"In those days, the sheriff would get so much money to feed the prisoners," said Kegg. "If he managed to feed the prisoners on less than that amount, he got to pocket the rest of the money."

Consequently, breakfast in the jail was usually watered-down oatmeal with milk, no sugar and a little salt for flavor. "The oatmeal was so thick it took two spoons to get the stuff into a bowel," said Kegg.

Dinner, the second meal of the day, was usually chili beans or macaroni and coffee. That was it.

If a prisoner returned from court too late and missed the 2 p.m. dinner meal, he had to wait until the next day for breakfast, said Kegg.

Deputies worked long hours, simply because there were not enough men to go around. "The work week was nine days on and the tenth day off," said Kegg. "Most of the time, that day off fell on a court day and you spent your day in the courthouse."

Often a deputy had to work double shifts.

It was tough, but there were bright moments, too.

Kegg remembered the time he went to Boulder Creek to stop a bar fight. A crowd had gathered outside the establishment and inside a lumberjack was smashing tables with a double-edge ax.

"Our plan of attack was to get the lumberjack outside or in custody without anyone getting



Ken Kegg

hurt, mainly us," said Kegg.

He and his partner went into the bar and faced the angry lumberjack who started toward them with his ax. Suddenly the big man fell face down, "like you would fall a tree," said Kegg. Behind him stood a slight, elderly gentleman who had come out of the restroom, seen the commotion and whacked the lumberjack over the head with a pool cue.

The hero then proceeded to berate Kegg about ruining the party in the bar with his presence.

Another time, Kegg joined a search party in the mountains to look for a lost deer hunter. The men split into three groups and headed into the brush.

The manzanita was so thick the men had to crawl on their stomachs for 30 to 40 feet at a time. About halfway through one of the manzanita patches,

one member of Kegg's team disturbed a yellow jacket's nest.

"No one would move forward or backwards," said Kegg. Every searcher who didn't wear a hat ended up "looking like a terminal case of the mumps," he said. "By this time the hunter had been found and we were overcome by joy."

But not all searches for missing persons were as funny. "Most of them were very sad, especially those involving young children," said Kegg.

As Kegg wound his way through the ranks, he came face to face with some of Santa Cruz history's worst moments — the mass murders.

He was one of the first to arrive at the home of Dr. Victor Ohta where investigators found the bodies of Ohta, his wife, two sons and a secretary.

"It was one of those crazy

things. We just couldn't believe what we saw," said Kegg. "It was a tough investigation. We worked on it as a team. We realized we had a major problem, and we had to solve it. "We got some lucky breaks," he said of the arrest of John Linley Frazier in connection with the Ohta murders.

Luck also figured in the arrests of the area's other mass murderers, Edmund Kemper and Herbert Mullins, said Kegg.

But the most baffling murder case occurred in the mid-50s when the head of a young woman was found in a shopping bag near the railroad tracks in Watsonville.

"Someone found the head of a negro female about 26 years of age in a Farmer's Market shopping bag from Los Angeles and that was it," said Kegg.

"We never found out who she was and we never solved the case."

After 29 years, Kegg has a lot to say about law enforcement and the criminal justice system. He believes the court system may give too much emphasis to the defendant and that it is wrong for a suspect to get off on a technicality.

He doesn't like the indifference of people now and he is upset with the way local government has turned.

But, he said, the best part of his job is the people he works with. "They are more dedicated and able to handle any situation with expertise. They also know their limitations and are able to ask for help. They are not afraid to say 'I don't know.'"

Now, Kegg presides over the department's investigation bureau.

A fatherly man with a sense of humor as big as the hills, he rules with a light touch. The men he commands and the people who work with him give him the highest respect.

In two weeks, his place at the head of the table for each morning's staff meeting will be filled with a new man.

But Kegg's touch will remain on the Sheriff's Department for a long time.

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REDUCTIONS**