

1980-1989

Capitola chief goes 'door-to door' to survey community's police needs

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Last month, the new Capitola police chief, Don Branton, went from business to business in Capitola Village to introduce himself and to make himself familiar with the town and its people.

Branton asked the people he met what they perceived as problems having to do with police protection.

This kind of public input is important to Branton, who

'I'm always soliciting input about how we can improve the service we deliver.'

— Chief Branton

wants the Police Department to have a high community-service profile.

Branton, 42, plans to draw on his broad background in police departments to give Capitola the ultimate police service possible with the department's budget.

His experience includes more than 20 years of police work in various departments in California and Colorado. He has worked with vice, narcotics, youth and community services, crime investigations, and homicides.

For the past four years, Branton was police chief in Patterson, a small town in the San Joaquin Valley.

Now in his fourth month as chief in Capitola, Branton has a number of ideas he would like to implement here.

Among them are having a school resource officer who would go into the schools and teach drug and child-abuse awareness, child safety and other pertinent topics.

He would like to see Capitola more active in crime prevention — to teach people how to protect their homes and possessions, give free security inspections, and start formal neighborhood and business watch programs.

He'd like to start a police cadet program with youngsters all the way down through junior high school — a program that met with much success when he was in Patterson.

Branton also sees the need

for a beach patrol in the summer, with officers in shorts and on bicycles patrolling the beach area and enforcing regulations.

"It all has to do with delivering the police service to the citizens in the town in the best possible way," Branton said.

But in order to implement any of these ideas, he said he needs additional personnel.

"I've got a ton of ideas," Branton said, "but unfortunately, they all require additional bodies."

Although Capitola has 21 sworn police officers, a relatively high ratio of about one officer to every 500 citizens in the city, Branton said these figures are misleading.

Capitola has population of 10,000 people only between the hours of 3 and 5 a.m. when everybody is at home sleeping, he said. "The rest of the time, we're probably looking at 40,000 to 50,000 people."

He added that of the 21 sworn police officers, only 12 are patrol officers. The others, besides himself, are a deputy chief, five sergeants and two detectives who do not regularly patrol.

Branton recently submitted a proposal to restructure the Police Department to City Manager Steve Burrell.

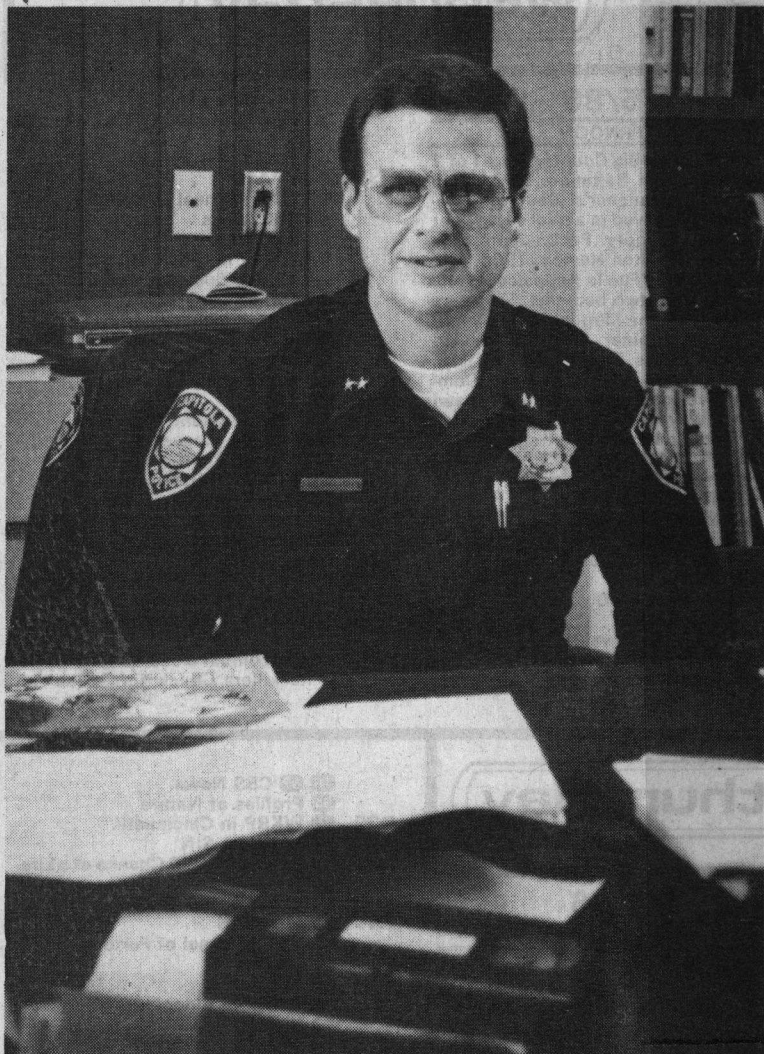
That proposal not only calls for additional personnel, but for reorganization of the Police Department staff. Branton would like to see a stronger chain of command in the department.

"There seems to be a lack of clearly defined lines of authority," he said, though he would not say what specific restructuring requests he made, pending the city manager's presentation of the plan to the City Council.

"The immediate benefits will be to the Police Department," Branton said. "The ultimate goal, of course, is the delivery of service to the people in the city."

"But it's difficult to translate to the public what we're doing when we're not sure what we're doing ourselves," he said. "So that's on our master list — defining clearly the areas of responsibility and authority."

Capitola is admittedly not a major crime center, Branton said, but the city's police department gets many service calls. A patrol officer's time is largely taken up with



Kathy Salamon

Capitola's new chief of police Don Branton

calls from people who locked themselves out of their cars, with going to accident scenes, and processing shoplifters.

In his belief that a high police profile keeps down problems, Branton would like to be able to have officers for community service programs without loss of patrol duties.

Recently, when the City Council requested additional police coverage of the Esplanade at Christmas time because of problems with drugs and transients, Branton had to hire two officers on an overtime basis for that work because he could not spare any of the regularly scheduled officers.

"Judging from the people that were down on the Esplanade last weekend," Branton said, "we have the need to put people down there every weekend on foot."

As for other problems in the city, drunk driving arrests will continue to be a high priority in Capitola, he said.

In 1984, Capitola had more drunk driving arrests than

the city of Santa Cruz.

"We want everyone to know that drunk drivers are not welcome in Capitola," Branton said. "The only place they belong is in jail."

Parking enforcement continues to be a problem in the Village area, and the Police Department receives many complaints about enforcement — either for being too strict or for not being strict enough.

"As police, we're caught in the middle of the parking dilemma," he said. "But the City Council installed the meters and it's our responsibility for enforcement."

One of Branton's reasons for touring the Village area last month was to get the business community's response to the enforcement of parking regulations.

"I'm always soliciting input about how we can improve the service we deliver, or at the very least, the perception of how we deliver the service," he said.

Eventually, Branton said, he plans to hit 41st Avenue to see what the concerns are there.

REFERENCE

GREEN SHEET
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