



Mike McCollum

Watsonville police officers, from left, George Cursi, Gary Maitoza, Chuck Carter and Ben Tumbaga.

Class of '60 produced a bevy of policemen

By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

In 1960, the young man who wanted to be a police officer could look forward to a career that focused on ticketing speeders, tracking down thieves and occasionally catching an armed robber.

An unusually high number of boys — 13 — from the class of '60 in Watsonville — at both Watsonville High and Mora Central High — the since-closed Catholic high school, went into law enforcement.

They had no idea in 1960 how much their profession would change.

In 1960, there were no anti-war protests, no student demonstrations, no requirement that people being arrested be advised of their rights. In less than 10 years, all that would change.

By 1970, officers were dealing with war protests, drug use and an anti-police attitude among some young people. The changes didn't stop in 1970. Since then, police have had to deal with increasing drug use, more gang problems, more automatic weapons in the hands of criminals, and the danger of getting AIDS from a drug addict's needle.

"There have been more changes in police work in the last 25 years than there ever was before, or probably ever will be," said George Cursi, one of four members of the class of '60 still on the Watsonville police force.

Cursi, Capt. Chuck Carter and Sgt. Ben Tumbaga went to Watsonville High, and patrolman Gary Maitoza went to Mora.

The officers, who will mark the 30th reunion of Watsonville High's class of 1960 with many of their classmates at Aptos Seascape Oct. 27, sat down recently to talk about their careers.

Carter, who joined the Police Department in 1966 after serving in the Navy, said, "I thought at the time the whole world saw police work as an honorable profession."

But even then, the public attitude was changing. Carter and his fellow officers were called to demonstrations in Santa Cruz and at San Francisco State College in the late '60s, where students were protesting not only the war, but the police presence.

"It came as a shock," Carter said.

See POLICE page 11 ▶

Reg. Pay.
10-6-90

REFERENCE

WATSONVILLE
REGISTER-PAJARONIAN
OCT. 6, 1990

Why they chose policeman's career

There were no early indicators that 13 men from the class of '60 in Watsonville would become policemen.

Some, like Gary Maitoza and Ben Tumbaga, thought about being officers while in high school. Others didn't consider it until later. Chuck Carter got the idea while in the Navy, and George Cursi was working in the city water department when he applied for an officer's job, partly because it paid \$90 more a month — big money in 1964.

There were no close friendships among the men, 11 of whom attended Watsonville High. Maitoza and Joe Montoya, classmates at Mora Central High, were in a class of about 30 people and knew each other well, but didn't pal around together.

Carter has a theory on why so many from his class became po-

licemen.

"I'm not sure, but traditionally one generation's immigrants and poor become the next generation's police officers," he said. "For example, Irish cops in the big immigrant cities and me, the child of immigrant dust bowl fugitives looking for work in the fields of California."

Carter estimates two-thirds of his classmates who became officers fit into the poor or immigrant category.

Not all the immigrant groups head into police work in large numbers, but one that has is Hispanics.

"The wave of the future, in California, is of course the Hispanic cop," Carter said.

Of the 13 that joined the Watsonville police force, Maitoza, Carter, Cursi and Tumbaga are

still there, and Montoya, Glen Witmer, Phil Mingus, Keith Jackson and Wayne Bixler served.

Jackson attended Watsonville High but moved to Arizona for his senior year. He returned to Watsonville and married a local girl.

Bixler was forced to retire two years ago after suffering a stroke and heart attack. He died last November of a second heart attack.

Those who served in other areas are Charles Guzman and Tom Westfall, both with the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office; David Dugger, who is with the San Francisco Police Department; and Earl Bresette, who is a warden for the state Department of Fish and Game.

Another current officer, Lt. Mick Aluffi, graduated from Santa Cruz High in 1960.

—Lane Wallace