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Santa Cruz Police hire first woman sergeant

Hard work pays off in coveted stripes

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PATTY REEDY didn't go into police work with any high-minded ideas about saving society.

"Hey, I came into it for the money, the job potential and the growth potential," Santa Cruz Police Department's newest sergeant — and first woman sergeant — said. "I'm sure somewhere deep down I want to help people. But I got interested in it late in high school because I knew the field was going to be opening up for women, and I was looking for a course of study."

After two years at Cabrillo College and two years at San Jose State University earning a degree in criminal justice, the Santa Cruz native was hired by the Santa Cruz Police Department. The year was 1980 and Reedy made five — five women on the force.

Today, besides Reedy, there are two women police officers working for the 69-member department.

But Reedy doesn't like to focus on that.

"When you play up the female aspect too much, you take away from credibility," she said. "Some people might have been hired (in law enforcement in general) at different times because they're female, but you won't survive because you're female."

"I've paid a lot of dues here. I've been around a long time. I don't feel I got promoted because of my sex."

Deputy Chief Steve Belcher confirmed that. He has watched Reedy's career since she was hired and said the 30-year-old woman "was promoted on the basis of her ability."



Chip Scheuer

Santa Cruz police department's newest sergeant, Patty Reedy, is also the agency's first woman sergeant.

Like stamina, for instance.

By 7 a.m. on a Friday, Reedy's been working nine hours and awake for 30. She still looks fresh. Her hazel eyes are unlined — and also show no trace of make-up. Reedy's one "statement of femininity" is the earrings she always wears when she works. Today, they're pearls.

In addition to being able to function on very little sleep when necessary, Reedy has other qualities that have served her well in police work. She lists them: "verbal skills, people skills, writing skills, being able to tune in with people, intelligence and a willingness to work hard."

In Reedy's eight years with the department, five of them have been spent on patrol and three in investigations. She's worked as a training officer, patrolled the mall on foot, handled child sexual-abuse, murder and all manner of criminal cases.

Reedy said of her chosen field, "I enjoy it. I really enjoy it. I like the variety. It's an interesting job, and it carries some respect."

She recounts some of her hair-raising experiences with a sense of humor — the same thing she counts on to help her deal with some of what she is faced with on the job.

She told about the first time she had to see a dead person.

"I was in training and all I could think was, 'I hope I don't throw up. I hope I don't throw up,'" she said. "I was terrified I would throw up and embarrass myself. But I didn't."

Then there was the first time she had to touch a dead body. A man had died of natural causes, and the cops had been called to move the body.

"It was gross," Reedy said.

"It's ucky. That's the only way you can describe it."

There are other "ucky" aspects to the job.

"There's danger, lots of it for all of us," she said. "You never know when it's going to happen or where or how. It could be a needle, a gun, a drunk driver. Or will a heart attack take you out when you're 40?"

She feels she's been relatively lucky. She's suffered a broken finger, broken toe, a cut forehead and has had repeated neck whiplash from being struck in the face.

"That's not too bad for eight years," she said.

There's also the shift work, which takes its toll on per-

sonal and home life. Although Reedy is single, she said she has seen the strain working 10 p.m. to 8 a.m. four days a week has on her married co-workers, especially the ones with children.

Then there's the "negative energy" directed toward cops.

"You have to really truly believe that it's not directed at you personally. It's directed at the uniform or the job, and you have to ignore it," she said. "And humor, that helps you deal with it."

The uniform, in addition to sparing her the job of choosing what to wear every day, has its advantages.

She said she has had to deal with relatively few com-

plaints from citizens about the fact that she is a woman police officer.

"Usually, they're looking for the uniform," she said. "If people are in trouble, they just want you to take care of it."

Of course, there were those early days when three women were sometimes on duty at the same time.

"It used to freak people out if there were two of us," she said, laughing. "Or three of us — my God!"

As for her co-workers, she said, "The working relationship seems fairly comfortable right now. I don't expect any problems."

Belcher said of the reaction

within the department to the first-ever woman sergeant, "It's been accepted extremely well."

As for the crew of six officers she supervises on mid-night shift and refers to as "the best shift going," she said, "They're getting used to me like any new supervisor... understanding what my demands are and my expectations are. And the same for me. I'm trying to understand their expectations and what I need to do for them."

And Reedy's future?

"I think I would like to progress as long as I stay in this field," she said, "whether it be through assignment or promotion."