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MPD's New Lieutenant - and Next Police Chief?

By Sophie Braccini



Jon B. King Photo provided

Moraga Police Chief Robert Priebe has not kept his retirement plans a secret. He has reached the threshold and although he does not display a particular eagerness to leave his post, he has been thinking about his replacement. When he recently hired experienced police lieutenant Jon B. King, Lamorinda Weekly asked him if he was grooming a future chief; his answer did not include a denial - Priebe said that the coming year would be the right time to prepare for a transition.

King's police career has unfolded entirely in the East Bay Regional Park District Police Department. Over a span of 29 years, he's had opportunities to practice his calling for law and order under a wide variety of circumstances. "I was part of the first Special Enforcement Unit, started a crime prevention program, worked as a field evidence technician and in the helicopter unit as an officer - as a lieutenant, I commanded that unit," he said. "I had a lot of great opportunities that prepared me for this job - in administration, with budgeting and hiring, and supervising the record unit. I also worked in investigation and was the press information officer for a number of years."

At his last assignment, as a watch commander, he reported directly to EBRPD captain Mark Ruppenthal, director of the operations division

and Moraga's former police chief. "It was he who recommended I look into this opportunity and told me that I would be a really good fit for the community," said King, also noting that he has collaborated with Moraga police on a number of cases.

Happiness emanates from King, who says he loves to come to work everyday. He is one of those individuals gifted with optimism, and he nourishes it with his love for his family and his work. Police work did not run in his family. "It was always a passion of mine," he said. He illustrates it with a story set at Crown Beach in Alameda when, as a young officer, he picked up a 2-year-old child who had run away and was having a good time by himself at the beach. "This was an opportunity to make a difference in someone's life, to have positive interaction with the public," he said, adding that it made him realize that such occurrences could have ripple effects and that it is critical that this job be done right.

King believes that catching bad guys and preventing crime is fun, too. "Just because right now Moraga is the fifth safest city in the state, does not mean that it will always stay that way; it is incumbent upon us to do everything we can, in concert with all our citizens here, to do our very best to keep us there," he said.

"If I have one person in this town who does not feel safe, then I still have a lot of work to do." He is working with Priebe on pushing out body-worn cameras for Moraga's officers. "These are fantastic tools," said King, who has experienced wearing one himself. "We're transparent, we act in public places; there is nothing wrong with recording things." He explains that as a supervisor, these tools give him an opportunity to sit down with officers and have them review how they do their jobs; but there are limitations - a single camera provides only one angle on a story. He cites the

example of a BART shooting where 23 different camera records were needed to get an accurate picture of what happened.

King admits that he hopes to take the helm when Priebe retires. Right now he is enjoying learning from the experienced chief and meeting the community. "Life is grand," concluded King. "I cherish every day, and I want to continue to go out and make a difference."

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