

James Speyer "loved being a Cheektowaga cop" for 31 years

By **Jim Herr** - October 19, 2018



Assistant Chief of Police Jim Speyer retires from the Cheektowaga Police Department on October 19th. (Jim Herr/Cheektowaga Chronicle)

CHEEKTOWAGA – Assistant Chief of Police James Speyer Jr. completed his final tour of duty with the Cheektowaga Police Department Friday morning and officially retired from the police force he has been a part of for the last 31 years.

He's turning in his gun for the gavel as he is set to be elected to the office of Cheektowaga Town Justice in an unopposed race next month.

"It's been a great ride and I loved every minute of it. It's not a cliché, I mean it. You know, you hand in your gun, you look, and you say, 'geez this looks like it's over,' but when you hand in your car keys, you know you're done," Mr. Speyer said with a chuckle to a room full of his colleagues. "I loved being a cop; I loved being a Cheektowaga cop. I spent the last few days trying to come up with some profound words for this speech, and every time I did my stomach was in knots."

He was appointed to the Cheektowaga Police Department on February 2, 1987, and quickly stood out as a model police officer.

"Right from the start, his first day, you knew that he was going to be a fast, fast riser in the department," Chief of Police David Zack said.

Mr. Speyer took on roles with the SWAT team, honor guard, and was a field training officer. In 1991, he was promoted to sergeant and oversaw the front desk and cellblock, and later was a training sergeant and supervised the day patrol shift.

In 2002, he was promoted to lieutenant and supervised the afternoon patrol shift before being tapped by Police Chief Christine Ziembra to oversee the Community Service Unit. He instituted the Citizens Police Academy and Youth Police Academy. He commanded the 2nd platoon in 2005 and later the Accident Investigation Unit.



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On the eve of 2010, he was promoted to Captain in charge of Information and Technology and began serving as the department's Public Information Officer, becoming the face of the police force when the public hears about the department in the news media. He would keep those job duties when he was tapped to be Assistant Chief of Police in 2014.

"You guys are the ones who get your hands dirty daily and put your lives on the line," Mr. Speyer told the officers in attendance at his goodbye celebration. "You guys are the ones who are making the news. I always tried to give you the credit. I hope that came through."

Both Chief Zack and Assistant Chief Speyer were appointed to the police department at the same time. Mr. Zack says a professional, competitive rivalry developed as a matter of course.

"I think those years of constantly competing with each other robbed us from developing a much deeper friendship at that time. Jim and I, we never disliked each other, we never disrespected, we were always happy to see one another succeed; however you're constantly in that rivalry," Mr. Zack said.

The job of Chief of Police evolved so much since the days when the assistant post was abolished by the town board that Mr. Zack says he went to the town board to reinstate the position a year or two after getting appointed to the top post.

After getting the council's approval, "I went back to my staff and said we're going to reinstitute this rank and I told all the captains, 'I don't know who's interested in this job. There's obviously going to be an exam for it, but let's just put it out there right now, there's only one guy I want. I love all of you, you're all capable, you can all do it, but I want Jim Speyer. He's the guy I want,'" Mr. Zack said.

"Jim Speyer is the glue that has always kept this administration together because he just has that ability to see everyone's point of view, to see everyone's idea, to parse it all out. We can't do what everybody wants, but he managed to parse it out where everyone walked away thinking we can live with this," added Mr. Zack. "The guy is a flat out pro who knows this business like no one else. He is flat out, one of the most intelligent persons I know."

Affable, honest, dependable, and loyal were among the words used by the chief to describe his friend and confidant, both personal and professional.

"When you look at the core values of this department; honor, integrity, discipline, and respect. I have no doubt that as the department came up with those core values, Jim Speyer was the inspiration for those words, because my friend, you are all of those words and more," he said.

You can add a family man to the list. A loving husband to his wife Donna, Mr. Speyer also raised four boys, three of whom are police officers.

"We don't throw the word love around in our family like some do, but I want you to know that I love you all and thank you all. I have been blessed in my career and my home life," Mr. Speyer said. "I'm proud to be apart of a police brotherhood. To you younger guys out there, enjoy each and every day, soon they'll just be memories before you'll know it."

Mr. Speyer is not slowing down just yet. He says he's going to continue to sit in on court cases to prepare for his judicial post and will be heading to Albany in December for training. He will start to adjudicate cases in January.

"I look forward to my next chapter in life, I really do. I look forward to more time with my family. I look forward to more hunting and fishing, but I will really miss being a Cheektowaga cop," he said.



Chief David Zack speaks during the ceremony for Assistant Chief of Police Jim Speyer as he retires from the Cheektowaga Police Department on October 19th. (Jim Herr/Cheektowaga Chronicle)

Cheektowaga Police radio sendoff:

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Chronicle video of Mr. Speyer's final ride home:

Chronicle photos of Mr. Speyer's final day:

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