

Introduction

Panel 1 of 2

**African Americans
in Alexandria
Public Safety**
Online Exhibit 2006

Alexandria Black
History Museum

Serving with

**African Americans in Alexandria
Public Safety**

Fire Sheriff Police DEPARTMENTS

Serving with Distinction: African Americans in Alexandria Public Safety is an exhibition that highlights and honors the African American men and women of the Fire, Police, and Sheriff's Departments who put their personal safety on the line every day to protect the citizens of Alexandria, Virginia.

Visitors to the exhibition will learn not only about the Fire, Police and Sheriff's Departments, but also about lesser known divisions within these offices and the civilians who provide support to them. Personal stories, photographs, and artifacts highlight the personal risks and safety factors involved in maintaining the required level of public safety and the evolution of safety equipment and services as they do the job of protecting the community.

Serving with Distinction honors the "trailblazers," black men and women who integrated Alexandria's public safety departments. The exhibition recalls the adversities African Americans faced and conquered; the personal and professional fellowship that emerged among the Fire, Police and Sheriff's Departments; and the professional and personal involvement in community outreach they maintained during their careers.

"I speak to the black experience, but I am always talking about the human condition, about what we can endure, dream, fail at, and still survive." —MAYA ANGELOU

Introduction

Panel 2 of 2

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Distinction

Saluting the highest ranking African Americans in Alexandria Public Safety



CHIEF DEPUTY VERONICA MITCHELL attended Alexandria schools, and earned a bachelor's degree in sociology and criminal justice from George Mason University. She joined the department in 1978, and moved through the ranks as sergeant, lieutenant, captain, and now chief deputy. She headed the Security Division at the Detention Center which houses 450 local, state, and federal inmates. Chief Deputy Mitchell was the liaison between the Sheriff's Office and the United States Marshall's Service, which handles the nation's highest profile and security risk inmates.

ASSISTANT CHIEF OF FIRE OPERATIONS RUSSELL MIDDLETON is assigned to the Administrative Offices of the Fire Department on Second Street. This military veteran from New York joined the department in the late 1970s. He was the first African American firefighter paramedic in the Fire Department and he rose through the ranks as the first African American promoted to Lieutenant, Captain, Battalion Chief, Deputy Chief and now Assistant Chief.



DEPUTY CHIEF EARL COOK, Investigations Bureau, is an Alexandria native who attended city schools and was a star athlete. At Duke University he earned a bachelor's degree in history. In 1979 he joined the Alexandria Police Department. He rose through the ranks to become Assistant Police Chief in 1996, progressing to his current position as Deputy Chief. He is active in Critical Incident Stress Management and works with a group of peer support officers. He also debriefs officers after major traumas.

The staff of the Alexandria Black History Museum thanks the following people and organizations who generously provided research, photographs, oral histories, and advice for the exhibition, *Serving with Distinction: African Americans in Public Safety*. Without their assistance, it would have been impossible to tell the fascinating story of African Americans in public safety in Alexandria.

Amy Bertsch, Public Information Officer, City of Alexandria Police Department
Deputy Chief Earl Cook, City of Alexandria Police Department
Charles Davis, Firefighter, Retired, City of Alexandria Fire Department
Liz Dixon, Counselor, City of Alexandria Sheriff's Office
Andy Evans, Lecturer, Comedy Counselor
Valeria Henderson, Museum Volunteer
Liz Kirk, City of Alexandria Fire Department
Captain James LeCruise, City of Alexandria Fire Department
Captain John Locke, Retired, City of Alexandria Fire Department
Jane Malik, Public Information Officer, City of Alexandria Fire Department
Willie Manning, Retired, City of Alexandria Fire Department
Captain Thurston McLain, City of Alexandria Fire Department
Chief Deputy Veronica Mitchell, City of Alexandria Sheriff's Office
Captain John Morehead, City of Alexandria Fire Department
Aryn Danielson, Volunteer Collections Management, Alexandria Black History Museum
Madeline Shaw, Office of Historic Alexandria
Epthal C. Stanton, City of Alexandria Police Department
Callie Terrell, Administrative Assistant, Retired, City of Alexandria Fire Department
Gerald Wanzer, Firefighter, Retired, City of Alexandria Fire Department
Michael Zuidema, ITS Coordinator/Multimedia Specialist/Alexandria Fire Department

Keeping

The Alexandria Sheriff's Office

Alexandria was founded in 1749 and incorporated as a town in 1779. The administration of justice was primarily the responsibility of the local sheriff appointed by the Fairfax County Court, charged with keeping the peace, maintaining the jail and trying local lawbreakers. In 1780, a separate Court of Hustings was established that acted independently of the Fairfax County Court of which Alexandria was a component from 1749 to 1800. While sheriffs continued to administer justice in the counties, the responsibility for overseeing prisoners and processing court papers in municipalities rested with city sergeants. In Alexandria, the office of City Sergeant functioned from 1780 to July 1971 when it was abolished under the Virginia Code 15.1-796.1. This code abolished the "Office of City Sergeant" and established the "Office of City Sheriff," effective July 1, 1971.

The Alexandria Sheriff's Office personnel is responsible for the operation of the Detention Center, courthouse and courtroom security service of all court legal documents, execution of court orders, transportation of prisoners, execution of arrest warrants, and general public safety and law enforcement. In retrospect, the beginning of Alexandria's present day Sheriff's Department can be traced to 1780 when the first city sergeant was appointed by the Alexandria Hustings Court.

In 1969 or 1970, Elsie Taylor-Jordan began as an Alexandria Deputy Sheriff, assigned as a matron in the city jail to work with the women inmates. This jail was located at 519 Princess Street in the heart of a black community known as the "Berg" in Old Town Alexandria.

The highly professional Alexandria Sheriff's Office enjoys state and national accreditation for law enforcement, corrections, and correctional health care.



A group photo of Sheriff's Office Deputies, graduates of the first Northern Virginia Criminal Justice Academy combined corrections and law enforcement class, 1970.



On January 27, 1981 Deputy Sheriff William Gene Trussdale sacrificed his life trying to prevent the escape of a dangerous prisoner. In 1985, the Alexandria City Council passed a resolution honoring him. During the opening ceremonies for the new Public Safety Center, an entrance roadway to the new Public Safety Complex was officially dedicated as Trussdale Drive.



Sheriff Dana Lawhorne, Chief Deputy Veronica Mitchell and Ms. Ormetta Lockette-Slaughter, Vice President of the National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice (NABCI) Northern Virginia Chapter during January 20, 2006 presentation to Chief Mitchell.



Annual Corrections Week Corrections Officer/Employee Wealth Laying Ceremony May 1996 at the Law Enforcement Memorial, Washington, D.C. Deputy Sheriff Camryn Banks placing a rose as tribute to a fallen officer, Sheriff James H. Dunning at the podium.



The City Council presentation of the Sheriff's Office first Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies Accreditation certificate in 1991. Shown left to right: Program Analyst, Manager, Home-guy, Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies official, Accreditation Manager, Lieutenant, Veronica Mitchell; previous Accreditation Manager, Lieutenant Robert Oregan; Deputy Wendy Webb; and Sheriff James H. Dunning.

THE Peace

MEET THE TRAILBLAZERS

Andy's Run for Sheriff

"The sky is the only place where there is no prejudice.
Up there...everyone is free." —BESSIE COLEMAN, A Pioneer Black Woman Pilot.



Andy Evans lecturer, former university counselor and the author of *Take A Break! The Comedy Counselor's Guide to Stress Relief* recounts his run as the first African American to seek the office of Alexandria Sheriff.

"The turbulent years of the 1960s and early 1970s found people accepting the challenge of getting involved in what was going on in their communities and around the country. It was a time of riots, plane hijackings, social unrest, and public safety at risk. Alexandria's jail was the holding place for many high profile detainees as well as local ones. The medical, sanitary, physical and mental conditions in the jail were unproductive for the inmates and the workers. The prevalent attitude was

"they're prisoners, who cares."

Inmates returning to society without proper medical care and their effect on the community were at issue. There was also no alarm system to warn the surrounding neighborhood of potential escapees who could compromise this neighborhood's safety."



Locking mechanism for a cell at 519 Princess Street



Cell in the jail at 519 Princess Street

Into this madness walked a young, native Alexandrian. Andy Evans, college student and budding civic activist, decided to make a run for Sheriff. Andy's platform was to make the 'Berg', location of the jail, and the African American community in general, more aware of and involved in the control of the jail. Public safety in his campaign was a major issue, but the press played up the black/white candidates instead of focusing on the issues. Even though he lost the election, his influence was potent. With a grant from the Joint Center for Political Studies (a black think tank), African American City Councilman Ira Robinson made him a star on his political team, interacting with the community, and helping to create a new sense of community activism.



Detention Center at 2001 Mill Road, completed June 1987, is state of the art. Different from the old jail this one has medical, dental, religious, educational, rehabilitative services, poetry classes and a variety of recreational activities, under the command of Deputy Sheriff Veronica Mitchell.



Deputy Walker Powell interacting with an inmate in a housing unit. A direct supervision style of management is used at this facility. The Deputy is assigned to work inside the housing unit as opposed to the linear method, where the Deputy works outside of the unit and makes rounds from the outside looking in.



Ms. Elsie

Elsie Taylor-Jordan, affectionately known as “Ms. Elsie,” started with the Alexandria Sheriff’s Office about 1969 or 1970 as a Deputy Sheriff. Ms. Elsie worked at the city jail located on Princess Street, in the “Berg” community of Old Town

Alexandria. After a few years she was promoted to the rank of Sergeant, a position she soon gave up in order to spend her weekends with her family. During the term of former Sheriff Norris, Ms. Elsie became the personnel analyst for the Sheriff’s Office. As a Deputy Sheriff, she was responsible for hiring, scheduling appointments, and other civilian positions. Ms. Elsie was a dedicated employee and loved her work in the Sheriff’s Department.

In September 1975 she transferred to the City personnel office where she served as a personnel assistant until her retirement in September 1988.



Old Alexandria Jail at 519 Princess Street

Do you know these interesting facts?

- The old jail is now a condominium.
- H. Rap Brown, called a militant in the 1960s, was held in the old jail.

As told to Liz Dixon by her mother Elsie Taylor-Jordan



There is a story about the Sheriff’s Office that stands out for me, as told to me by my mother. During a time when the old jail was in the Berg, the inmates were planning a “break-out” and the plan was to take my mom as hostage! I couldn’t understand why this didn’t scare or worry her. But she seemed calm and in control, with all her focus on getting to work to do her job, in spite of the threat. As her daughter, and along with the rest of my family, we all begged my mom to just quit the Office.

She would have no part of it. Instead she walked the halls of the old jail making it known that she was aware of plans to escape and take her as hostage. She reminded the inmates that she knew most of them, had raised most of them in the neighborhood and knew most of their parents personally. She advised them that they better get it right because if they failed, they had her to answer to! She was never afraid and showed more concern for the safety of the Office, which is just the type of person she is.

During this episode my mom was escorted everywhere she went, even to church, by law enforcement. She was also told to carry her weapon on her person at all times, but she refused to carry it inside her church! Needless to say, the “break-out” never happened and my mom was safe. My mom talked about this situation for years to come and she would always say how unafraid she was and how foolish we were to worry — after all, she was just doing her job.



Community Outreach



The first Alexandria Sheriff's Office Talent Show, May 1992. This event was sponsored to raise funds for the YMCA. From left to right: Sheriff James H. Dunning, the Director of the YMCA and Mrs. Cheryl Echane, Sheriff's Office Classification Counselor who was the originator of the idea and the program sponsor.



Annual Christmas Toy Drive for children of incarcerated inmates sponsored by the Sheriff's Office and Offender Aid and Restoration (OAR).



Deputy Derrick Ramsey and Alexandria Police Officer Charlotte Young Mitchell in 2003, Drug Awareness Officers in the City Public Schools at a Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) exhibit.

In Celebration of A Job Well Done



RETIREMENT: Deputy Sheriff Harry Charly (rear - third from left) at his retirement dinner in September 2004 and the following Sheriff's Office staff listed from left to right, rear: Deputy Ricky Traynham, Deputy Shelbet Williams, Front: left to right: Sergeant McCray-Brown, Deputy Derrick Ramsey and Deputy Floyd Pittman.



HONORS: January 20, 2006, Sheriff's Office staff at ceremony to present Chief Deputy Veronica Mitchell with the Northern Virginia Chapter of the National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice award for service in the field of criminal justice.

Back row left to right: Supervisory Program Analyst Wendy Webb, slightly out of view, Deputy Dawn Jeffries, Deputy Robinson, Captain Tony Davis, Commander Monde' Monroigay, Captain John Griggs, Deputy Lisa James, Captain Anthony Di Cesare, Sheriff Dana LaWhome. Middle row: Ms. Maria Saadqua-Turner, Ms. Deborah Ferguson, Chief Deputy Veronica Mitchell, Ms. Ruth Graham, Ms. Adell Diaz-Garcia, Deputy Felicia Monish. First row: Ms. Gloria Hicks, Lieutenant Lucinda Buber, and Ms. Lenora Murphy.

From 18TH

The Alexandria Fire Department Protects the Community

The Alexandria Fire Department began with the establishment of Friendship Fire Company in 1774. Its first engine house was little more than a shed located on Royal Street near the alley entrance to Market Square. In 1784, the Company moved the shed and built in the same location a frame building more akin to an engine house. It was a one-story structure measuring 10 feet by 12 feet. Sun and Star Companies joined with Friendship in 1852 to start an insurance company.



1800's firemen showing horse drawn engines. Group appears to be parade ready.

Bells were the tools used to summon members to the firehouse for duty. Bells were expensive but necessary. Friendship purchased a 500-pound bell in 1857 at a cost of \$300. It was reported to have an excellent tone in the key of D.



One of the first examples of the city government supporting fire companies came in the early 1800s when the City's Common Council purchased lamps for the outside of fire stations. After the Civil War, the City began purchasing steam fire engines for the companies to replace the equipment destroyed during the Occupation and decided to pay an engineer and driver to operate them.

The 1960s was a time of social change in the country, and Alexandria followed suit. On July 27, 1966, John M. Davis, Jr., was hired as the first African-American fire-fighter in the Alexandria Fire Department. He worked in Alexandria until 1978.

The Alexandria Fire Department has responded to many serious fires and hazardous incidents, including airplane crashes.

These Alexandria African American fire fighters were among the many rescue teams going into the Pentagon following the September 11, 2001 bombings. Before they went in, they prayed together for their safety, the people around them, and promised to try to protect each other in a "one for all, all for one" spirit.



(Left to Right) Captain John Locke, Fire Fighter Keith Walker, Captain John Morehead, Jr., Captain James LeCruise.

Century to

MEET THE TRAILBLAZERS

“I’m not some dumb ‘so-and-so.’ I’m smart and I aspire to be the Fire Chief.” —GERALD WANZER

Most of these young men came into the Alexandria Fire Department during the 1960s and 1970s. They were in their mid 20s, military veterans and familiar with all of the kinds of positive and negative attitudes and behaviors that African Americans faced. John Davis was the first African American firefighter hired. Gerald Wanzer and Clarence Evans followed. Evans was the first African American Deputy Marshall (investigator). By all accounts he endured the most harassment and had the most difficult time because of his race.



Image of Fire Department Trailblazers, retired and current Alexandria firefighters at exhibit information session in the Lee Center.

Left to right standing: Captain, Ret., John Locke, Captain John Morehead, Jr.

Left to right seated: Firefighters, Ret., Gerald Wanzer and Charles Davis, Captain Thurston McClain, Firefighter, Ret., Willie Manning

GERALD WANZER'S childhood dream was to be a firefighter but he was too young then to know that his race was in the way. As a young veterans, though, it was his long-time friend John Davis, already an Alexandria firefighter, who urged him to join him in the Alexandria Fire Department. John Davis' experiences were troubling, to say the least. After 6 or 7 years, he decided to leave the Fire Department. Gerald stayed on, continuing to follow his dream. The Alexandria Chapter of Professional Firefighters Association was organized and the very outspoken Gerald Wanzer became the first president. He was always a person who spoke out, challenged wrongs, and tried to make them right. He said “I am not some dumb ‘so-and-so’. I’m smart and I aspire to be Fire Chief.” He was first in line to be a Lieutenant when he suffered an on-the-job injury. He was retired in 2 weeks, against his will, after 12 years of service. But he looks at the young African Americans in the Department now and is so proud of them. He says they make him feel good.

21ST Century

RETIRED CAPTAIN JOHN LOCKE was accepted into the Alexandria Fire Department in 1974. He felt the recruit training was no more difficult than his military training. He said he was assigned to a commander who was fair, so he did not have quite as difficult a time as some other African Americans. He was gratified when someone walked in and handed him a white shirt for his blue shirt, signifying that he had risen from firefighter to lieutenant. He finally rose to the rank of captain, and was given command of a truck company. Captain Locke felt it was very important to rely on your ability to get along with people. In 1976 he was elected Firefighter of the Year by his fellow firefighters.

CAPTAIN JOHN MOREHEAD, JR. is President of the Alexandria Chapter of Professional Firefighters Association. He gradually rose through the ranks to finally become a captain. His career in the Fire Department is notable because of his ability to withstand the negative attitudes, rejection and isolation to which he was subjected during his early years. He recalls the many times he ate alone, the times he felt his personal safety was not secured by the men working around him. Captain Morehead's courage and endurance in spite of the difficulties is a testament to his strong character and that of all the other trailblazers like Charles Davis, Willie Manning, and Thurston McClean.

The team of Engine 208 and Truck 208, B Shift.
Captain James LeCruise is commander of the first all African American fire team, which is located in the west end of the city. He says his men are good for the children to see, identify with, and respect African American firefighters for who they are and what they do. They are often referred to as "Buffalo Soldiers."
Front: Lieutenant Sam Parker; On truck left to right: Captain James LeCruise; Firefighters John Ashby, Brandon Ways-Kelly, John Harris, and Steven Richmond





The following images present a snapshot of official Fire Department activities:

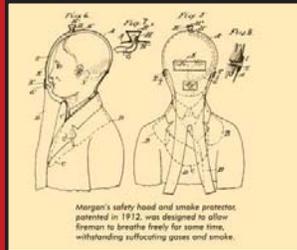


Firefighters pulling an antique steam engine.



Firefighters struggle to save a house on Payne and Queen Streets.

This air mask is a prototype of the one invented by African American Garrett Morgan. The original mask was designed to allow the fireman to breathe freely for a long time amid dangerous gases and smoke. The invention was well received from fire departments all over the country. But when many of them found out that Morgan was black, they cancelled their orders. Unable to sell the mask in the south, he hired an actor while he dressed as an Indian. Then they announced that Big Chief Mason would go into the smoke-filled room and come out unharmed. They sold the masks.



Morgan's safety hood and smoke protector, patented in 1912, was designed to allow fireman to breathe freely for some time, withstanding suffocating gases and smoke.



Firefighter recruit class with Battalion Chief Chet Helms as a young recruit. He currently commands the Fire Training Academy, the first African American to hold this post.



First aid. Medics team provide advanced life support.



Ivy Hill Cemetery, site of the annual memorial service for fallen firefighters.



Alexandria firefighters in action.



Crossing

African Americans in the Alexandria Police Department

The thin blue line is a symbolic line representing the police. It separates and protects the law abiding citizens from the non-law abiding.

The Alexandria Police Department was formed in 1870 and nearly a hundred years would pass before it would hire its first African American officer. Several large cities, like Washington, D.C., had black police officers as early as the late 1800s, but most were restricted to work in black neighborhoods.

When Alexandria formally organized its Police Department in 1870, the Board of Aldermen asked for nominations of men who would make good police officers. Among the fifty names offered were those of four African American men. During the debate on the nominees, the board members expressed concern that some white citizens would not respect a black officer's authority. In the end, the white men received the largest number of votes.

Decades would pass before the Alexandria Police Department hired its first black employee. Though records cannot confirm it, oral history indicates that man was Arthur Grigsby. In the 1940s he began working as a janitor at the police station on North Fairfax Street.

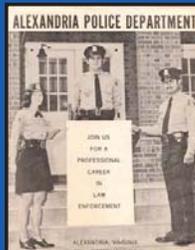


Two men load dogs into the animal control truck in Lynhaven. Though not police employees, these men appear to be doing animal control work in this photo, perhaps taken around 1950.

The first publicly visible black police employees were school crossing guards. Equally important were the civilians that worked in the Police Department.



Civilian employee Virginia Branch seen here with Lieutenant Monroe K. Bryant worked for several years in the planning unit.



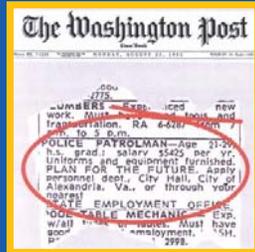
A recruiting ad from the early 1970s promises equal opportunity and proudly shows the diversity of the Alexandria police force. Left to right Officers Tia Surina, Junior Bowling and African American Jim Ammons pose in front of police headquarters.



Civilian employees celebrate Christmas at an office party in the records room.

THE Thin Blue

In 1953, the City Council passed a resolution that prohibited discrimination in the “employment of city government personnel because of race, creed or national origin.” But ten years later, a black officer had not been hired. In the early 1960s, the Human Relations Council and the Employment Committee worked to try to integrate the police department but progress was slow. In 1963 a columnist wrote that Police Chief Hawes was holding out for a “policeman’s version of Jackie Robinson.” In the summer of 1965, the Alexandria Police Department found their Jackie Robinson. Albert A. Beverly, a 24-year-old African American from King George County and an Air Force veteran, took the oath of office and became the first person of color to be



A young man from King George County saw this Washington Post classified ad in 1965 and applied to the position. He became the first African American to serve as an Alexandria law enforcement officer.

sworn in as an Alexandria police officer. He was the only black police officer in the Washington, D.C. suburbs. At the time, Officer Beverly said he just wanted “to be equal and treated like all the other rookies on the Alexandria Police Force.” In 1967, full integration was still years away. Officer Beverly was still the only policeman of color in the suburbs, and at the Alexandria Police Department the only other black employees were seven crossing guards and five janitors.



Deputy Chief Earl Cook applauds retired officer Albert Beverly (second from left) in October 2005 on the 40th anniversary of his historic swearing in. Mayor William D. Eubie, City Manager James K. Hartmann, retired police Captain Norman Gimm, and Lieutenant Donald Hayes, Police Chaplain look on.

Officer Albert A. Beverly

First official police department photo of Albert Beverly, the first African American to serve as an Alexandria law enforcement officer.



Line

MEET THE TRAILBLAZERS

New Era—Real Integration Begins

By 1972, several African Americans had joined the ranks as Alexandria officers and they included Al Beverly, Felton Gilliam, Al Washington, Bill Boyce, Tony Harper, Bob Wynn, Herman Springs, Pete Moss, Steve Martin, Jim Ammons, and Bill Banks. Bob Wynn and Herman Springs became sergeants and Bill Banks rose to the Lieutenant rank. Alexandria native Tony Harper served many years as a corporal, but more importantly, was the first person of color to supervise homicide investigations in the City. Officers spend much of their time on patrol. They also handle violent crimes, domestic disputes, alarm calls, traffic accidents, and many other community services.



A dozen years after the first black officer joined the police department, many patrols squads have only a single African American officer. Officer Bob Wynn (left, back row) proudly stands with members of the Fourth Platoon in this 1978 photo.



Police officer Steve Mason works for fingerprints at a burglary scene. He worked as a crime scene technician, K-9 handler, public information officer, the chief's aide, and a patrol supervisor before being promoted to lieutenant.



On January 27, 1981, a prisoner trying to escape, shot and killed Deputy William G. Truesdale. In this photo, officers quickly apprehend Deputy Truesdale's assailant in a parking lot. Deputy Truesdale is the only law enforcement officer of color to die in the line of duty in Alexandria.

Today, African American officers serve equally throughout the department in highly visible and specialized assignments. In 2005, when the department honored retired officer Albert Beverly on the 40th anniversary of his historic achievement, native Alexandrian Deputy Chief Earl Cook, the department's highest ranking African American, hosted the ceremony and thanked him for having the "courage to be first."

Community Outreach



Lieutenant Gwen Robbins talks to a group of school children around 1992.

In 1974, Gwendolyn A. Robbins became the first African American woman to be an Alexandria police officer. The people affectionately called her "Christie Love" after the popular 1970s movie and TV show, "Get Christie Love," about a black female police detective in Los Angeles. Gwen Robbins retired in 1996 as a lieutenant.



The Alexandria Police Department sponsors The Explorer's program for 14-24 year olds. Its focus is leadership and interest in law enforcement.

Two members of the Kwanis Club and then-chief Charles Strobel present Officers Kathy West and Herman Springs with an award for their outstanding service.



In this photograph taken around 1990, Officer Donald Hayes plays chess with an Alexandria girl. Officer Hayes grew up in Washington, D.C. He joined the United States Air Force where he served as a Military Police. He joined the Alexandria Police in 1981. He is now a lieutenant and Chief Executive Officer for Evening Patrol as well as Captain for the Police Department. Lieutenant Hayes holds a bachelor's degree from Bowie State College and is currently enrolled in the Masters program at Capital Bible Seminary in Lanham, Maryland. He was recently installed as pastor of Oakland Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia.



"You're On Your Own" Crossing Guard to Supervisor of Crossing Guards

EPTHAL STANTON, Supervisor Police/School Crossing Guards,
recalls her first few days on the job.

“

When the position of Crossing Guard Supervisor changed from the responsibility of a sworn police officer to that of a civilian, I applied for the position and became the first and only African American woman to hold the position. Being a supervisor was different in many ways, beginning with working full time, twelve months, as compared to just (only) working a few hours in the morning and afternoon, no holidays, and no summers.

My most memorable learning experience during the more than thirty years of service occurred three days after I began my first Crossing Guard assignment at the very busy Tyler Elementary School intersection of Beauregard Street and Braddock Road. The patrolman on duty with me was called to another assignment, so he turned to me and said 'You're on your own.'

I said, "Whaaat!!" I finished the day and went crying to my husband, a National Park Service officer. He told me not to worry, he'd go with me the next day. He showed me how to work (direct the traffic) that intersection and even today, I know I can work any intersection.

I find Alexandria's Crossing Guards competent, easy to work with and have great respect for each other and the positions we hold.

”

Epthal C. Stanton, Supervisor Police/School Crossing Guards

In late 1950, the Police Department hired its first auxiliary police women to work as crossing guards at the schools. In early 1951, eleven women, including three African Americans, went to work in uniform with badges and whistles. The fact that women were performing police related duties was far more controversial than the fact that the Police Department had hired blacks to do the same job as whites.

(Left to right) Janie Wright, Rosa Lee Stowers, and Desiree Vass were the first police employees of color to work in a public capacity.

