

# PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: 5/3/2019

---

City of De Pere  
335 South Broadway  
De Pere, WI 54115-1199  
www.de-pere.org

Contact: Andrew Pantzlaff  
Communications Specialist  
Phone: 920-339-2371  
apantzlaff@mail.de-pere.org



## Stephenson retires after 40+ year career with De Pere police

DE PERE - By any measure, the career of De Pere Police Sergeant Ken Stephenson has been far-reaching, influential and profoundly impactful.

He has served as a faithful, dedicated guardian of the community for just shy of 41 years – that’s nearly 15,000 days; more than 2,000 weeks, all spanning over the course of five different decades (and just a few months removed from a sixth decade).

But all this time and all this valuable work in and for De Pere, comes to a long-awaited close today, Friday, May 3.

Stephenson is retiring after one of the longest public servant tenures ever in the history of the City. The seeds of this long journey for Stephenson were first planted on Career Day as a senior in high school. The year was 1975, and two deputies from the Door County Police Department gave a talk to students explaining their profession.

Prior to this, the Vietnam War was still going on, and Stephenson had been mentally preparing for the very real possibility that he would be drafted into the military. He had thought about joining the Navy. The military draft ended in 1973, and the speech given by the two Door County deputies shifted Stephenson’s focus.

Stephenson graduated from high school in 1975, but first to work in a Door County factory for a year to save money.

With the money eventually in hand, the time for change had come.

He got married on a Friday, and entered the NWTC police science program the following Monday.

Two years later, never one to waste time in transition, he graduated from the program on Friday, June 2, 1978, and went to work for the City of De Pere Police Department on Monday, June 5.

The enormity of changes he would see from that day forward is something he could never have imagined.

“When I came here, it was a much smaller community at the time. The population has just about doubled, I’d say, since I started. The amount of land has doubled. Most of the industrial parks didn’t exist at that

time. There was half the housing that there is now. The schools have increased. It's amazing," Stephenson said.

He's also seen plenty of changes in the job itself.

"It's hard to imagine for some, but when I started, there were no cell phones. No computers," he said. Stephenson also mentioned everything from equipment to bodycams to squad cars to training has changed significantly as well.

One thing that has remained constant, though, is the meaningful work he gets to do for people in the community.

"This is a good community. There's a lot of good people here. During my career, I never had a desire to have a promotion to a desk job. I always like to be out by the people, and I've met a lot of good friends along the way. Some of them I've met in negative situations, which is common in this job, but some of those people I see now are grateful that I helped them out when I did, and turned around and helped them."

That opportunity to help others, over such a long period of time, is something Stephenson cherishes the most as he reflects on all the many faces, people and places he's been privileged to encounter and help. For many of those years as Stephenson worked his way up the ranks within the De Pere Police Department, his was done after sunset. Up until about five years ago, he was on night shift continuously.

"Some of the most memorable things that have happened in my career can't be printed," Stephenson said. "Some of the things you see during the night ..."

He trails off at this thought. Only he knows what images reside deep in his memories of decades of De Pere late nights.

"It takes a different type of person to work nights," he says finally to finish the thought, before adding: "But then again, it takes a different type of person to be a police officer."

As a police officer, Stephenson has practically seen it all in his career.

And, now, as this long, impressive career finally comes to a close, he's excited to see what's next.

"I worked 41 years on a 6 days on and 3 days off schedule, so you end up working a lot of nights, lot of holidays, most weekends. Now I'm going to retire and see what the normal population lives like, with weekends off, and holidays to myself. I've bought a new set of golf clubs. Got a new bike. I'm just going to enjoy some leisure time and see where it takes me from there."

###