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Profile Story -- Chief Harvey Baker

### **Law Enforcement: For Some, It's an Obligation; For Harvey Baker, It's a Calling.**

Being a police officer is no easy task, but University Park Police Chief Harvey Baker has been tackling the job for years.

Having already retired from another position as assistant chief for the Maryland National Capital Park Police seven years ago, Baker has since spent his time doing what he loves in a community he loves.

“I feel very blessed, I’ve got the best of both worlds. I’ve enjoyed being police chief and I’m a police chief in an environment that I enjoy.” said Baker.

Baker was named University Park chief of police in 2019 and has made efforts to improve the force’s safety and procedures. There is now an automated speed enforcement program, as well as a residential speed camera. Baker also pushed for the introduction of body cameras for officers and was the first in the area to introduce hybrid police vehicles.

In addition, Baker started an initiative called Walking Wednesdays during the pandemic where he and other town officials walk through neighborhoods to speak with and get to know residents.

Listening to people's concerns and questions, especially following the aftermath of George Floyd’s death, “made the community feel like they were part of the police, and I think that's important because they are,” said Baker.

Baker also started "Chief's Blog - What's Up (University Park)?!" to better communicate with residents about safety, upcoming events, issues or crimes in the community, and more.

“When I first got here, people were like ‘We don't know what's going on,’ and I want you to know what's going on, so I started the blog so I could put critical posts about safety information out,” said Baker.

Mayor Lenford Carey said “our expectations of our police officers and police force have changed... Chief Baker has been a vehicle for that change and he has been an instrument for that change... at a challenging time for policing.”

When looking for the next chief of police in 2019, Carey was looking for a “21<sup>st</sup> century police officer” and one interview question about a mother involved in a police incident became the deciding factor.

Carey and the town council were looking for someone who was up-to-date on police reforms and said that it was Baker’s empathy that landed him the job during the interview process.

“He expressed a great deal of empathy... he expressed a great deal of concern for what a wrenching decision that was, which was just, to me, a very human response,” said Carey about Baker’s response to the interview question.

Long before joining the police force, Baker enlisted in the Air Force, following in his father’s and grandfather’s footsteps; Baker's father served in the Air Force while his grandfather served in the Army and fought in World War II.

“I just thought it was the right thing to do and to serve my country,” said Baker.

Even though Baker has made it his life’s work to be devoted to the force and to helping people, he did not have aspirations to be a police officer in his youth.

“I was raised by a single mother, head of the household, and very strict, so I had a good sense of right and wrong and so... getting into trouble? That wasn't me...” Baker said, “I was trying to be obedient and make my mother proud.”

While Baker never set out to be a police officer, he was taking classes while in the Air Force and one professor from Oakland, CA inspired him. The professor was a detective and “he

was really sharp, and he impressed me... After that, in my four years of service to our country, I decided to become a police officer,” said Baker.

Baker has worked in multiple police departments and other jobs in law enforcement throughout his career; he has been a sergeant in the Air Force, an assistant chief for the Maryland National Capital Park Police, chief of police for the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission Police, and worked as a federal contractor before becoming chief in University Park.

Mayor Carey’s brother-in-law, now a lieutenant for the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, had worked with Baker when he was a lieutenant for the Maryland National Capital Park Police.

Carey said he called his brother-in-law during the selection process of the new chief and asked if he knew Baker, to which he replied “Harvey was absolutely, hands-down the very best lieutenant that I ever worked for.”

According to Carey, his brother-in-law said Baker was by the book but that he was “absolutely fair”, and Mayor Carey agrees.

Being in law enforcement usually means working with other officers, and being a sergeant in the Air Force allowed Baker to work with others and build relationships with his squad.

Baker recalled a story of a former officer put on his squad who was close to being fired, and Baker listened to his concerns and anger. He explained: “They could fire you, but they decided not to, so stick with it.”

While small, a selfless, human act of decency and respect is what represents Chief Baker. He believes in people and the goodness of people, and wants to help however he can.

“I try to serve the community... I'm an advocate of community policing... I don't like crime, so I try to reduce crime. I want people to feel safe.” Baker said.

Baker makes it clear that while he is responsible for upholding the law, he is just like every other resident in University Park.

“It is what keeps me grounded, keeps me listening, and keeps me wanting to serve,” he said.

He reminds his fellow officers: “Although you're a police officer, you're still a part of that community, and the community is part of you... You're there to serve them... Our responsibility goes a little higher than a regular citizen because we're paid and we're sworn to serve and protect, but don't lose sight of that you're a part of that community. You're not there to police the community, you're not above the community, you are a part of that community.”

@cassiepeo: Chief Baker has been serving his community for years with dedication to his job and to the residents of his community, and his career proves that for some, law enforcement is a calling.