

Officer Joanne Vallone

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Behind The Looking Glass

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Sometimes, running into the chief of police can turn into a great career move.

When Chief's Administrative Officer Joanne Vallone first moved to Georgetown in 1990, she had every intention of taking the civil service exam and looking for work in law enforcement.

"It was always something I was curious about," said Vallone.

Vallone's children were of the same age as Spencer's, and when she mentioned her intentions in conversation, he told her there was an opportunity opening up in his department as a reserve officer.

At the same time, the department attempted to shift administrative duties from a full-time officer to a secretarial position, a move that lasted only a few scant weeks. Rather than turn the duties back over to the full-timer, Spencer selected Vallone to act as the chief's administrative officer - a reserve officer who handled all of the day-to-day paperwork that helps keep the department running.

"I took over payroll, firearms permits, scheduling special training for officers," said Vallone. She also took care of court filings and officer scheduling, a duty that has since been passed on to Lt. Dave Thomson.

She also acts as the department's liaison on sexual assault cases.

"Thankfully we don't have a lot of those," said Vallone.

She doesn't come from a police family, per se, but Vallone had several close relatives on the police department in Beverly, where she grew up.

"I looked up to them," said Vallone. "I'd listen to them talk and it sounded like an interesting field."

The toughest part of police work is "the grim side," said Vallone.

"You see a lot. Deaths, assaults ... traumatizing things that you know are going to affect people for the rest of their lives," said Vallone.

But being a part of this tight-knit force is a great experience, she explained. While her role limits the amount of time she spends outside the station, it also puts her in a spot to deal with the public on a regular basis. It becomes a matter of intuiting what each person is looking for and knowing how best to guide them.

But she feels connected to the action outside the station, though.

"I'm not out in the field all day like the others, not as hands-on," she said. "But I like being able to be a part of the big picture, knowing those guys are out there saving a life. Being part of the family."

And the department really is like a family, said Vallone.

Vallone said one of the highlights of her work is watching the members of the force grow up. When she started, she already had two children of school age, and she would see young officers and predict what would happen when.

"A lot of these guys started in their early 20s. So I'd say OK, in five years you'll be doing this, and two years later you'll be doing this," said Vallone. "Of course they'd say, 'No way!' But I've been able to see these guys get married and start families... it really is a family here."

She has also been witness to the department as it grew with the ever-changing town.

"We're moving in the right direction," said Vallone.