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## New North Port chief hits ground running

By LAUREN COFFEY Staff Writer  
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1 of 2



SUN PHOTO BY ALEXANDRA HERRERA City Clerk Patsy Adkins swears in North Port's new Police Chief Todd Garrison Wednesday night.

NORTH PORT — Two days before he was sworn in, Todd Garrison worked alongside other officers on a felony take down.



“It’s very unusual the top guy is out there on the street and my guys will tell you I was out there with them,” said Garrison, a former district commander for the Lee County Sheriff’s Office. “It’s the one thing I say: my badge says police on it. It might say chief on the top, but it says police.”

Garrison was sworn in as North Port Police Department’s chief on July 16 after a four-month search by the city. He replaced Kevin Vespia, who retired from the role after seven years.

Garrison continually referred to himself as a “cops’ cop” or someone who understands what the officers are currently dealing with while patrolling the community.

“It’s part of the issue that was driven during this process (getting asked) are you a cops’ cop?” he said. “I was asked that by a lot of the community members and other officers and I am, I’m truly a cops’ cop. So I’m looking at things at a front line view as opposed from up top down. I haven’t been removed from the streets very long so I know what it’s like to respond to these calls and deal with the issues these cops are dealing with.”

He has worked in law enforcement for 26 years and is now settling into his new role. One of the first changes he is implementing is switching the classification of positions to mirror other departments. For example, instead of being called patrolman, the employee would be called a police officer. Assistant Chief was changed to Deputy Chief and Inspector was changed back to Captain.

“It’s just a title change but it goes along what many other law enforcement agencies are doing across the country,” he said. “I believe in a more traditional chain of command and that’s what I want to start re-aligning with, a more traditional police department.”



He is also looking on the horizon toward some bigger projects. He had a first meeting with architect firm Hall, based in Sarasota, to conduct a feasibility study for expanding the police department building.

“We are busting at the seams here; we’ve outgrown this building,” he said. “We’re looking to build out, up and around.”

And the department will also be expanding to offer officers for specific West Villages coverage. The commissioners are working on the final FY2019 budget, which includes eight officers who would work most likely in shifts of four to cover the exploding neighborhoods in the area. “Our response time is too long to get up there and it’s a safety risk,” Garrison said. “If you have one officer going up to a priority call, for another officer on the south side of the city (to get to the West Villages area,) it’s just too far.”

And Garrison himself is looking to get embedded in the entire community. He recently launched his own Twitter account, @NPPDPoliceChief, where he personally tweets police and city information and events.

“It just kind of personalizes folks, it’s an opportunity for people to get a peek into the chief’s life and what he does,” said Josh Taylor, who runs the North Port Police Twitter account. “Now I’m in a competition with him. He’s getting stuff I wouldn’t normally know is going on and over the last week we’ve probably had an extra 50 followers (for his account). People are really catching on to it.”

Garrison wants to continue the communication online and in-person. He can best be reached by email, at [tgarrison@northportpd.com](mailto:tgarrison@northportpd.com).

“I’ve put so much out there, I’m going to be an open, honest, transparent police chief,” he said. “If there’s a problem I want to know about it and if the public needs to get a hold of me I’m accessible.”



Email: [lcoffey@sun-herald.com](mailto:lcoffey@sun-herald.com)

Photos:

SUN PHOTO BY ALEXANDRA HERRERA

City Clerk Patsy Adkins swears in North Port's new Police Chief Todd Garrison, as his father Shirley holds the bible on Wednesday night.

PROVIDED

Todd Garrison

