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Garrison marks anniversary as North Port police chief

By TOM HARMERING Staff Writer
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North Port Police Chief Todd Garrison chats with residents at Dunkin' Donuts in North Port during a Coffee with the Chief event. Garrison named one of the safest places to live in Florida, according to The Home Security Advisor.

SUN FILE PHOTO BY ALEXANDRA HERRERA

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Staff Writer

NORTH PORT — Todd Garrison always thought he would work in law enforcement. His father and grandfather were cops in Michigan.

But he never imagined he'd end up as a police chief.

Garrison, the 46-year-old North Port police chief, has just wrapped up his first year on the job.

“I didn't try for the job the first time it was advertised,” Garrison said. “I had heard about it, but I didn't apply.” At the time, he was wrapping up his 24th year in the Lee County Sheriff's Office, working out of Fort Myers.

“But then I heard that (City Manager) Peter Lear had rejected all four finalists,” he said. Garrison talked to a colleague, who urged him to try for the job when it was reposted. “He said, ‘hey, what do you have to lose?’”

He was named as one of four finalists for the position. “I also heard there were challenges here and that morale was lagging,” he said. “Then I received the phone call offering me the position.”

Garrison began working as chief on July 16, 2018.

His information was accurate: There were issues and morale was low.

“But what I learned was that the issues were growth issues and morale was low because they did not have a permanent leader for some time,” he said.

“There were good people in the force here,” he said. “But they were overwhelmed. This city is growing so fast. The force needed to grow with it.”



For the first six months on the job, he commuted to North Port from his home in Cape Coral — a distance of 54 miles each way.

Today, by most measures, morale is high. His department is fully staffed and crime is dropping. “There is no secret to what I do,” he said. “I just let people be real. If we make mistakes, admit it and move on. I fully back my people”.

The North Port Police Department has established a reputation as a great place to work.

But there are issues:

“Crime moves mostly through the city along I-75. We patrol a good stretch of it and catch some of it. And, of course, sometimes crime stops in this area. We snare a lot of it.”

The biggest issue facing the police force is its size.

“Our police building is only six years old,” he said. “And it is woefully too small.”

Garrison has asked the city to either remodel or replace it.

“Whatever costs less,” he said. “But when you see people having offices in closets, you know we’ve outgrown it.”

The request for more space is before the City Commission.

“North Port is a good place to be,” he said. “Unless you’re a criminal. Then it’s not so great.”

