



Tatum police chief has found his calling



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NEWS-SUN

As a child, Tatum Police Chief Brad Riley moved around a lot. Before moving to McDonald at the age of 19, his family went back and forth between Michigan and Tennessee with stops in Oklahoma and Georgia.

Riley said his family's frequent moves were the result of a father who was always looking for his calling. Fortunately for Riley, he found his own calling much earlier in life.

After spending several years working in the oilfield pipe and supply business, Riley started working in law enforcement. Nearly a decade later, the Tatum chief knows that law enforcement is what he wants to do for the rest of his life.

"Law enforcement was always kind of something I wanted to do ever since I was a kid. Whenever we played cops and robbers I always wanted to be the cop," he said.

At 34 years old, Riley is a young police chief. He got his start in law enforcement in 1997, when he joined the New Mexico Mounted Patrol as a volunteer reserve officer. In 2000 he got his first full-time job in the business, joining the Lovington Police Department, and after about five years did a short stint with the Eunice Police Department before moving to Tatum.

There was never one memorable moment when Riley knew he wanted to be a cop for the rest of his life, he said, but the lure of law enforcement quickly pulled him in. Even when he was just a reserve Mounted Patrol officer helping LPD at car accidents at football games, he knew. "The Mounted Patrol just kind of whetted that appetite

and it just kind of grew from there into a desire to actually do it as my chosen career," he said.

Riley said the desire to help people and to make a difference in the community fueled his desire to be a cop.

"Everybody talks about the problems within the community and things that they don't like. This is an opportunity for me to actually get involved and try to fix some of those problems, or at least be a means to an end to fix some of those problems," he said.

In Tatum, Riley got the chance he was looking for to become part of the community. With such a small department — Riley only has two officers — the chief must take a big part of the workload. Riley works a shift just like any other officer, responding to accidents and emergency calls. He orders supplies and schedules training on top of the normal paperwork that comes with being chief.

At larger departments there are levels of administration separating the chief from the street. In Tatum, Riley enjoys the fact that that separation does not exist.

"It keeps me in touch with what's going on in the community," Riley said of his job. "It's not an ivory tower-type position where I'm just sitting back and everybody's telling me things. I can get up and actually see it and be part of it."

Throughout his career in law enforcement, Riley has always put a lot of focus on combating drugs, and he brought that philosophy with him to Tatum. Fighting drugs is not just about locking people up, he said. It's also about getting people the help they need so they can put their families back together and go on with their lives.

In January, he organized a seminar for parents, teachers and others in the community to talk about drugs — what

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Tatum Police Chief Brad Riley

they are, what they do, what the warning signs are.

"If you have a 15-year-old boy that all of a sudden doesn't want to sit with you on the couch and watch TV, it doesn't mean that he's on drugs. But if we string 10 things together we may have something to look at," Riley said.

Riley feels the event was successful and is planning to hold another. Officer Vicente Garcia, who has worked with Riley since joining TPD in December, thought the seminar was a good idea too.

"With all the problems that we had, that was the best thing to do here in Tatum. We had a pretty good outcome and it made everybody aware," he said.

Riley hasn't given much thought to his future in law enforcement. He thinks a lot about the things he wants to do to put his small department on par with other, larger law enforcement agencies in the state. But he doesn't know where, if anywhere, he wants to go from Tatum.

All he knows is he wants to be wearing a badge for the rest of his working life.

"The goal that I set for myself was to become chief of police and I attained that goal, so now I have to figure out what's the next goal that I want. Is it chief of police in a bigger town? Is it chief of police somewhere else? What do I want to do from here?" he asked. "The main goal I set in my life I achieved. Now I have to think real hard on what I want that next goal to be."

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