



Office of Mayor Lawrence J. Morrissey
LEADING BOLDLY, WORKING TOGETHER

Chief Epperson Retirement Announcement
Prepared Remarks
Mayor Lawrence J. Morrissey
October 14, 2015

If you would have asked me in 2005 to predict the most challenging issues I would face as mayor in my time in office, I would not have mentioned among them, 'managing internal relations within the Rockford Police Department.' But in fact, looking back, that has indeed been the case.

That being said, I can't imagine working with anyone more prepared and more committed to help our community through those issues, transitioning into a modern, effective, constitutional police department than Chief Epperson. Chief Epperson has been a rock solid, steadfast, and stalwart leader of the Rockford Police Department over the entire course of his career, especially during his time as Chief. And so it is with great pride and great appreciation, but also sadness that we announce the Chief's retirement, effective November 13, 2015.

The Chief and I have frequently discussed, and shared in common, many philosophies of leadership. That made it easy for me to support him, and for him to support me when, in the interests of the department and the community, we made unpopular decisions. From the decision to bring in outside experts to examine our use of force practices, training and discipline to our move to geographic policing, investing in prisoner reentry efforts, or opening CompStat meetings to the public, the Chief has never shied away from tough moves; he's never been afraid to introduce new approaches; he's never been afraid to challenge the status quo, even when he knew it would bring personal attacks and challenges to his professional career and personal relationships.

Thanks to the Chief's work and the accomplishments of the Department under his leadership, the Department is in an excellent position to continue our improvement.

- Unlike where we started, today, the Department has data-driven systems like CompStat to hold itself accountable openly and transparently with our community.
- Today, the Police Department participates fully with our other departments as a team in our City RockStat Management meetings, demonstrating that we work together and reinforcing our organization's ACTION values, a critical part of how we do business.



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- Today, the Rockford police department is fully accredited and among the very best departments in the nation at aligning our approaches with the best practices in the nation.
- And today, we are operating in all areas of the City under a geographic policing model and making investments in decentralized, geographic police district facilities that will enable us to best serve our citizens for many years to come.

While our success and the Chief's success can be measured in many ways, most importantly, the Chief has successfully balanced our overall effort to reduce crime while respecting the constitutional rights of all citizens. Under the Chief's leadership, our overall crime rate is down significantly, and we've greatly enhanced our ability to reduce violent crime through collaborative efforts like our Violent Crime Task Force and Parolee Reentry Efforts.

I would be remiss if I didn't specifically highlight the incredible job the Chief has done to drive improvements in officer use of force. Under the Chief's leadership, the Department has reduced use of force incidents by 50% and dramatically reduced complaints against the Department for excessive force. This has been done through incredible emphasis on officer training, mentoring, and monitoring. This means a safer environment for our officers and our community. And this has been done without sacrificing our work to reduce crime.

Through the lens of what has happened to Police Departments in Ferguson, Missouri and around the nation, the Rockford Police Department can proudly hold itself out as one of the nation's foremost leaders in constitutional, community policing. And our entire region benefits now from the Chief's leadership to help start the Boone-Winnebago County Integrity Task Force.

Indeed, we are well ahead of other areas of the State who as of next year will be mandated to do the things that we are already doing voluntarily.

Perhaps the most important management lesson that has helped us to achieve success is the critical importance of the Mayor's Office, Police Department, and other city departments and community organizations to work as a team. I see across the country examples of division within leadership that makes it practically impossible to successfully navigate the extremely difficult police community relations facing cities today. Chief Epperson invited and welcomed support from our internal team and he fostered relationships effectively with community partners to help us navigate successfully the transition of our department.

I'd like to especially acknowledge the support of our entire Police command staff, Pat Hayes and our legal team, Julia Valdez and our H.R. team, our technology team, and Jim Ryan our City



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Administrator. We have also been greatly supported by local clergy and Chaplains, the local NAACP, and other community organizations. I'd especially like to thank Pastor K. Edward Copeland from New Zion Baptist Church who has been an incredible partner and community leader working to reduce violence and support accountable collaboration.

Today, we have permanent, positive, systemic improvements to the Rockford Police Department that provide a foundation for our future work. The Chief has prepared our Department to do more than just arrest suspects. We are prepared to be the best possible partners in reducing violence in our community through partnerships like "Connect Rockford", which was discussed just today in an editorial in the Rockford Register Star.

The Rockford Police Department is one vital component in our effort to improve public safety and prosperity in our community. We are prepared now to manage shared success with our other public and private partners.

At this point in his career, Chief Epperson is the longest serving Chief of Police among Illinois largest cities. And while the Chief is known for being a data-driven, earnest student of police practices and theories, he won't cite any of that as the basis for his longevity in office. What he will point to is what should be a source of strength for all of us: faith, family, and dedication to a vision of peace and prosperity for our entire community. The Chief has led not only in his work at the Department, but in demonstrating the critical need for our officers to make their families their number one priority so as to become a source for the strength to be the best possible servants for our community.