

Women Advancing In Police Work, But Few Pursue It

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While women have made great strides in law enforcement, the number of them employed in Fairfield County police departments underscores the belief that police work is not an appealing career track for many of them.

"I have been in law enforcement for over 25 years, and it still surprises me that more young adults do not see law enforcement as a viable career, especially women," said Chief Betsy Hard of the Bloomfield Police Department.

"I am equally as surprised to find that the current trend for women in law enforcement is to avoid the promotional ladder. Many women are pigeonholed into a desk assignment or specialty field, and then decide to stay for convenience. Those who do try to promote then fail due to a lack of experience," Hard explained. "I encourage women to take risks by applying for and accepting new opportunities and assignments that may take them outside of their comfort zones. Developing leadership requires

taking risks, succeeding and failing, but ultimately learning and developing a broad experience base," Hard added.

A survey of larger police departments in Fairfield County by The Justice Journal indicated that Bridgeport has the highest percentage of female officers, at 13 percent, while Fairfield's four female

officers represent about four percent of its force.

The Connecticut State Police Department has a female population of slightly more than six percent with its 79 female officers on a force of 1,226. Troop G has four female troopers, including Master Sergeant Barbara Festa.



In a recent nationwide study, of 53,302 new police recruits, an estimated 17 percent were female.

"In Stamford, women officers make up a little less than 10 percent of our force," says Assistant Chief Susan Brethauer, who has served 24 of her 28 years in law enforcement with the Stamford Police Department. As far as females, that city has 19 patrol officers, one lieutenant, four sergeants, and one assistant chief of police—the highest-ranking woman cop in the county.

"As much as we think we've changed, law enforcement is still considered a

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State Trooper Samantha McCord takes her turn at a recent firearms event sponsored by the Connecticut Association of Women Police. Formed in 1958, the association with about 200 members offers a support system to its members, and sponsors a variety of mentoring programs and events to bring members together.

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Department of Correction, Theresa C. Lantz. The longest-serving chiefs are Chief Hard of Bloomfield and Chief Lisa Bolduc of Williamantic, both of whom were appointed in early 2003. Chief Karen Krasicky of Plymouth was sworn in April 2005, and Chief Lynn Baldoni of Middletown was sworn in October 2006.

Women who have achieved rank in the state police include one lieutenant colonel, one captain, four lieutenants, two master sergeants, and five sergeants.

Support for the Sisters in Arms

Back in 1958, a small group of female officers in Hartford began the Connecticut Association of Women Police (CAWP) as a support system. As the number of female police officers increased, so did membership. Today there are about 200 members from across the state.

"No one likes to talk about the officers and supervisors face challenges; stereotypes and perceptions that exist, every new assignment and promotion



Assistant Chief
Susan Brethauer



Detective
Karla C. Rodriguez

because it's against the law to be biased, but they do exist," says Detective Karla C. Rodriguez, the current president of CAWP, who has served with the Intelligence Division of the Hartford Police Department for the past 13 years. "A female police officer or a very petite male officer must do what they can to excel and prove wrong those who think they don't deserve to wear the uniform. But, so what if there are higher expectations for women police officers? Those expectations have only made me a better cop."

Yet, she adds the very thing that makes women cops stronger also serves as a stress factor.

"Overall, I don't believe that the true challenges I have faced throughout my career were gender based," said Chief Hard, a Massachusetts native who worked her way up through the ranks in Santa Monica, CA. "All new



Four female officers practice their shooting skills at the firing range.

presented challenges. Everyone is tested and put under a microscope; it's part of the business. Did I face some obstacles because I was a woman? Sure. But obstacles merely present you with an opportunity to make a decision: do you go around them, over them, or through them, or do you remove them? Is it really an obstacle that impacts you, or are you merely allowing it to impact you?" she added.

Along with offering a support system to its members, CAWP sponsors stress-relieving events such as walking and running, annual shoots, bus trips, and get-togethers. It also supports mentoring programs and fundraisers and offers scholarships to qualified students pursuing a career in law enforcement.

"We also have affiliate members with other organizations like the International Association of Women Police and participate in events with other organizations such as the Connecticut Chapter of Men and Women for Justice," says Detective Rodriguez.

The group encourages women to enter the field of law enforcement and holds to a strict ethic of standards and professionalism to assure that those who join have the tools necessary to find success and support serving in this tough but satisfying line of work.

"In my eyes, you can change one mind at a time by proving yourself, but you can't change the ingrained mindset of the police culture overnight," says Detective Rodriguez. "But this job is one that is extremely gratifying. It's about doing the best that you can, recognizing what you could have done better, and learning from yourself and others everyday."

For Chief Hard, who also had to learn to juggle marriage and kids along with being one of the top cops in the state, it comes down to one thing: "Bottom line is that if you work hard, if you possess the required skills and courage it takes to be a police officer, and if you work with integrity, you will be respected by those who matter to you."