



by Jackie Perrone



Mike Roth

Mike Roth is a retired police chief who led a department through 29 years of spectacular growth and who thinks Lexington is the only place in the world to live.

“Law enforcement is the only thing I ever wanted to do,” he says. “I was able to get onto the Lexington Police Force when it was a tiny organization in a very small town, and stay through years of phenomenal growth. I was and am still very proud of the Lexington Police Department.”

Roth faced plenty of challenges during his decades with the Lexington Police. Like all of the other public services in this once-small town, population growth could have overwhelmed the police department. He made it his mission to keep that from happening.

In September of 1975, Roth applied for an opening in Lexington after some years of experience as a Reserve Police Officer in Indiana, several months at the Swansea Police Department, and a small stint working with the Richland County Sheriff. In his employment interview, Roth told the staff he would work to make the Lexington Police Force truly professional. For the next 29 years, he did exactly that.

“My first move was to get all the department vehicles painted black and white, so they would be instantly rec-

ognizable. That may sound like a small thing, but it was important and made a big difference. We were able to outfit the officers with bullet-proof vests, and we changed their firearms from revolvers to Smith and Wesson 9mm pistols. We were also able to equip all the patrol cars with cam-corders. This did away with the complaints about inappropriate police behavior, as it gave an absolute record of what actually happened. In all my years there we found only one occasion where an officer did not follow protocol. We have computers in all of the cars now, which aids officers in report filing and communication,” says Roth.

His department achieved state accreditation nearly 10 years ago. When he retired, 31 officers were on staff.

Roth was the first Lexington police officer to go through the FBI Academy in Quantico, VA. He received his credentials from William Webster, Attorney General of the U.S. in 1993.

He also remembers the tornado of 1994 very well. “We had just arrived in Pittsburgh for a vacation,” he says. “My staff called me that afternoon to tell me what had happened, and we returned home the next day. The destruction was astounding. We called every individual into service, but we never had any looting or any real problems, and amazing-

ly, no one was hurt in that big storm,” says Roth.

“Our town does not have much violent crime. There have been three homicides in the past 30 years. That’s three too many, of course, but a very low figure overall.”

Chief Roth had one close escape when a thief grabbed some jewelry at Moseley’s Diamond Showcase and ran. Roth was nearby in his patrol car and took pursuit. He had to wrestle the thief into submission and the man was able to grab Roth’s gun and pointed it at him.

“I know God was watching over me. The thief was not able to get the safety off and could not get the gun to fire. I was not hurt at all.”

His wife, Roseanne, and the employees of Moseley’s Diamond Showcase, called him a hero. He shrugs it off, but admits it was a narrow escape.

“Lexington has been very good to me,” he says. “I know that God has been a powerful force in my life also.”

Mike Roth proudly proclaims that he is a third-generation law enforcement officer, following his father and his grandfather in that calling. “And it is a calling,” he says. He thinks that legacy may fall away now, since his two daughters are in other fields, but there are four grandchildren on the roster. Who knows? ■