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Acton Police Department

Chief Richard Burrows

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Acton Police Chief Richard Burrows Retiring After 36 Years in Law Enforcement



Acton Police Chief Richard Burrows will retire on Dec. 28. (Courtesy Acton Police Department)

ACTON — Acton Police Chief Richard Burrows had no desire to be a cop when he was studying Management Information Systems at UMass Lowell in the early 1980s, but when a friend told him about a good paying job directing traffic in his hometown of Tyngsborough, Burrows gave it a try.

Thirty-six years later, Chief Burrows retires this week from the law enforcement field that grabbed his interest quickly and firmly.

"I just fell in love with it," Burrows said of the career he began with just a few hours of training and an offer of \$12 an hour — far from the training and starting pay required today. "It was just the excitement of going to work and not knowing what I was going to be doing that night. I also really came to appreciate the ability for us to try to help people at some of their worst times."

Despite becoming a police officer in 1986, Burrows still completed his bachelor's degree in MIS at UMass Lowell in 1988. He took computer classes at BU Corporate Education Center in 1997, received his certification from Microsoft, and for years — from 1998 to 2011 — he put those skills to use running the computers and networks in the Town of Tyngsborough while simultaneously working for the Police Department. In 1996, he also earned a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice from UMass Lowell

By 1996, Burrows had already risen to the rank of Sergeant at Tyngsborough Police, and in 2002 he was promoted straight from Sergeant to Deputy Chief. In 2004 he completed the FBI National Academy.

In 2013, Burrows moved on from his hometown of Tyngsborough, and joined Acton Police in a community that was about twice as large.

"The Department was much larger and it was a good chance for me to work in a larger region," Burrows said of his move.

The move to a larger town meant more activity and more officers, but Burrows said police often face the same kinds of problems in small and medium-sized towns as police in larger jurisdictions.

"A lot of people think in small towns you don't run into the same problems you do in the cities," Chief Burrows said. "I'd say we don't run into them as often as the cities do, but I've seen a lot over the years in the communities I've worked in."

To this day, Burrows still praises retired Acton Police Chief Frank Widmeyer, whom he credits for helping to prepare him for the pinnacle of his career — becoming Acton Police Chief himself. He also is grateful to his other Police Chief mentors from Tyngsborough, John Miceli and William Mulligan.

Burrows' career took him from the 1980s, when the war on drugs, violent crime, and the crack cocaine epidemic was the top priority of policing, to modern enforcement that prioritizes community policing, crime prevention, and a more compassionate approach.

Burrows said former Tyngsborough Police Chief Charles Chronopoulos was an early leader in community policing, utilizing the strategy in Tyngsborough long before it became a national trend.

Chief Burrows is also extremely proud of the Acton Police Department, a forward-thinking, compassionate Department that now employs full-time mental health clinicians and participates in restorative justice programs, domestic violence services networks and other programs that prioritize compassion and community involvement as well as enforcement of laws.

"There's a really good team here in the Town of Acton. The community is very fortunate to have very professional young men and women who work here and provide a really high level of service," Chief Burrows said.

Chief Burrows said the highlights of his career are not so much the major incidents or harrowing crimes he worked on, but the time he spent getting to know community members, building relationships, and working on more mundane but incredibly important things like earning accreditation for the Acton Police Department — the gold standard in police accountability in Massachusetts.

After years patrolling the streets, including responding to a horrific fatal accident on just his second night on the job, Burrows believes that kindness and courtesy remain a police officer's most important tools.

"I tell new officers to treat everyone you're dealing with like you're dealing with a relative," Burrows said. "Everyone you're dealing with is someone else's brother, cousin, or relative, and if you treat everyone that way you'll have a nice and successful career."

Chief Burrows's last day on the job will be Wednesday, Dec. 28. He is slated to be replaced by Interim Chief James Cogan, the current deputy chief.

Chief Burrows has no official plans lined up for retirement yet, but plans to spend plenty of time with his wife Bernadette Pugh, who is retired from a career working in Lowell Public Schools. He also plans to continue helping with traffic details in Acton, so residents might still see him directing traffic in town as the need arises.

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A message from the Acton Police Department

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