

Chief Leo Matrangola leaves lasting legacy in Bel Air and beyond

by Kathi Santora

Bel Air Police Chief Leo Matrangola loved details. His uniform was tack-sharp, no matter the time of day. Precisely stacked paperwork on his desk usually included information about training programs and equipment designed to enhance skills of his police force. When needed, his hand would hover over a bulging Rolodex and land on just the right person for the situation.



He also understood the importance of image in law enforcement, says Deputy Chief of Police Richard Peschek, who recalls with a smile the year that Chief Leo arrived at the Bel Air Holiday Parade with one of his family horses: "He threw a police blanket and saddle on his horse and joined the parade. People thought we had a mounted unit."

Bel Air Police Chief Leo Matrangola's memorial service took place at the Bel Air High School auditorium on August 22, 2015 because no church in town could hold the number of colleagues, friends and residents who came to pay their respects.



Before his appointment to the Bel Air Police Department, Chief Leo had completed a 21-year career as a lieutenant and supervisor of the Baltimore County Police Department narcotics unit. In 1991, at the age of 39, he started a second career as the Police Chief of Bel Air, his hometown. The Chief's arrival coincided with one of the most dramatic economic and population growths ever seen here.

According to Deputy Chief Peschek, a 35-year-veteran of the Bel Air Police Department, Chief Leo set out to make sure that his police department was up to the challenge.

Over the years, Chief Leo advocated for changes that would build a solid police force: technical training, better pay and retirement benefits, up-to-date uniforms, comprehensive manuals, state-of-the-art vehicles and participation in a multi-jurisdiction SWAT Team.

He was quick to brag about his officers and their accomplishments and slow to self-promotion. He was usually on hand for community presentations and summer police camp graduations.

The majority of personnel on today's police force reflect his values. "Leo was very selective in the people he hired," says Deputy Chief Peschek. "We have an excellent staff of officers here and he hired most of them."

Deputy Chief of Police Peschek is Acting Chief until a replacement is hired. "Since I have been in this position, I have a deeper respect for what he did. A lot of police chief work is behind the scenes and people may not understand that."

