



TOWN MANAGER

February 28, 2019

SGT. OF DETECTIVES JOHN WENTZ SELECTED AS NEW TAOS POLICE DEPARTMENT CHIEF

Town of Taos, NM – Town Manager Rick Bellis has announced that Detective Sgt. John Wentz has been selected as the new Chief of Police for the Taos Police Department. Wentz will be replacing retiring Chief David Trujillo, who completed 20 years with the Taos Police Department, having spent his full law enforcement career with the Town.

Wentz, a Taos County resident, has been with the Taos Police Department for 17 years and was promoted last year to oversee the Town's Detective Division. Prior to his service with the Taos Police Dept. Wentz worked for the St. Petersburg Police Dept. in St. Petersburg Florida where he rose from a patrol officer (3 years) to Detective of Vice and Narcotics (12 years), Detective of Economic Crimes and eventually Detective of the city's Intelligence Unit.

During his service with the Town Wentz has been the detective behind the solving of several complicated high profile homicides and similarly served as the Town's liaison in a number of high profile drug ring take downs, working with county, state and federal agencies.

"I am very proud of the fact that we no longer need to look outside of our own department or community to find the experienced personnel we need. The Town's policy of 'hire locally and promote from within' has served the community and the department well and Chief Wentz is a great example of that", said Town Manager Rick Bellis.

The Taos Police Department has received significant recognition recently for having made a substantial impact on local crime, decreasing overall crime by 30% over the past 3 years and property crimes, such as burglary, by almost 60%. Most recently, the perpetrators of a series of purse snatchings and strong arm robberies were caught within minutes of the crimes and their capture led to the solving of multiple outstanding crimes.

"We have made public safety our top priority under this administration, increasing wages to be competitive, and adding new positions, technology, training and vehicles in the Police Dept. and moving the Town for the first time to a full-time 24/7 Fire Dept. I think having to not look outside the department for our new Chief of Police for the first time in a decade, along with the really impressive improvement in our crime statistics, is another sign of our having made the

right decisions and having the right people”, said Taos Mayor and State Representative Dan Barrone. “We are truly proud of our PD and our fire fighters”, he added.

The selection process for the Police Chief included an interview panel of Town and County first responders, a community representative, and a series of meetings with the officers, sergeants, detectives and civilian staff of the Department to gather their input, consultation with the Town Council, followed by a meeting by the chosen candidate with the Mayor.

The same system was used to select Chief Trujillo and Wentz will be the second Chief selected under the Town’s merit-based personnel system that removes political appointments of all positions except the Town Manager and Town Attorney.

Sgt. Ron Montez, also a local resident and a 20-plus year veteran of the Taos Police Department was the only other candidate for the position.

“We had two very experienced, highly qualified candidates to choose from and it was a tough decision, with the officers expressing support for both veterans of the department. I am certain that both candidates will figure prominently in the development of the department going forward, but John’s experience was a little broader in where we want the leadership of department to focus ”, said Bellis.

Asked about his selection as Chief, Det. Wentz said, “Seeing the outpouring by the department for Chief Trujillo during his retirement, I hope to continue and build on that feeling of bringing the department together for each other, for the mission of the department, and to continue making our community a safe place for our officers and the public. We have a great team and I am really looking forward to working with them and on their behalf”.

Barrone and Bellis both reiterated that drugs, gang-related crime, violent crime and crimes against property, all of which are inter-connected, are and need to remain a priority for the Town going forward.

Chief Wentz will take over at 12:01 am Saturday morning, February 29th.

For further information or any questions, the press contact for this release is the Town Manager, Rick Bellis, who can be reached at rbellis@taosgov.com. Office: (575) 751-2002, cell/text: (575) 770-2606.

