

FEATURED

## Jenkins reflects on 47 years of making a difference

Pullman police chief to retire in August

By Emily Pearce For the Tribune

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Pullman Police Chief Gary Jenkins poses for a portrait.

Courtesy of Gary Jenkins

**PULLMAN** — A constant in the community since 2010, Pullman Police Chief Gary Jenkins is set to retire in August after serving 47 years in law enforcement.

As Jenkins leaves his badge behind, Pullman Police Commander Jake Opgenorth will be promoted to chief of police, filling the position.

Jenkins has served Pullman since 2010, when he decided to uproot his Southern California life and move to the Pacific Northwest. He grew up in Claremont, Calif., on the eastern edge of Los Angeles County, and graduated from Claremont High School. Later, he went on to study administration of justice at Trinity College, received a bachelor's degree in management from University of Redlands and received his master's in leadership at San Diego State University.

Jenkins is passionate about law enforcement, but before he began his career in the field, he wanted to be a pilot. When Jenkins graduated high school it was near the end of the Vietnam War. He said that plenty of pilots had many flight hours and there was more supply than demand. Considering what field to go into, he did a report for a government class on law enforcement and fell in love with the profession.

"I went on some ride-alongs and really after going on these it really caught my interest," Jenkins said. "I felt like I wanted to go into this so I applied for a position as a police cadet in West Covina and did that for three years."

Jenkins started working for the Claremont Police Department as a police officer when he was 21. Growing up in Claremont, he was happy to work at the department because it was his community. He said getting good experience at Covina confirmed law enforcement was something he really wanted to do.

Going to the police academy, he worked in all areas of the police department, and enjoyed working as a detective. Later he was promoted as the detective supervisor and worked his way up to becoming the rank of captain.

Jenkins had worked at the Claremont Police Department for 33 years and had maxed out of California's retirement system. He still had the desire to work, so he and his wife were set on moving somewhere in the Pacific Northwest. Looking at police chief positions in Oregon, Washington and Alaska, Jenkins was hired by Mayor Glenn Johnson at the end of July 2010, and has stayed in the area ever since.

Law enforcement is something Jenkins is passionate about. Working in the field for so long, Jenkins rarely considered leaving because it was a job that interested him.

"I always wanted to be challenged, and I always look for ways to challenge myself," Jenkins said. "I wanted to do something that I felt made a difference in the community, and I think throughout my entire career, law enforcement to me really fit that bill."

Some challenges about the work Jenkins does is being exposed to human tragedy on a regular basis. Jenkins said advice he'd give to other officers is to not be afraid to ask for help, make sure to stay mentally healthy and have a good work-life balance.

"I think more recently, newer generations are better at this than my generation is, but it used to be you held it in and asking for help was seen as a weakness," Jenkins said. "But I think that's changing, and that's changing for the good because it takes a toll on someone over the years."

A benefit of his work is being able to meet well-known figures. Jenkins has provided security for Bill Clinton, the U.S. Women's Soccer Team, and was able to have an interview with Anderson Cooper in New York.

Outside of law enforcement, Jenkins and his wife love to travel. He has six children who live in Southern California and Texas, and all his grandchildren are in California. He loves spending time with his dogs and teaching them new tricks. And, he has recently took up the hobby of woodworking.

Jenkin's wife manages the gift shop at Pullman Regional Hospital, and the two don't plan on leaving the Palouse for a long time.

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