

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Bandera City Marshal blazes the trail of firsts, change, transparency and trust

By Jessica Nohealapa'ahi
The Bandera Prophet

Established in 1853, Bandera was first surveyed by John James and Charles de Montel. The first mayor was Ray Marvin Hay, who served from 1964 to 1968. The first Marshal's Office, which replaced the Bandera Police Department, was created in 2011. Setting her stone on the path of significant firsts in the history of Bandera, Nancy De Foster is the first female City Marshal.

She follows the lead of her mentor, who was the first female chief of police in Honolulu.

"She and I are still very close friends. She was my first phone call," De Foster said, after her appointment by Bandera City Council last month. "She gave me some sage advice, and said 'put me on speed dial if you need anything.'"

De Foster was appointed March 21, launching a new chapter of her law enforcement career that began in 1993, when she was hired as a dispatcher with the Honolulu Police Department.

"There was a hiring freeze for officers at the time," De Foster said, who retired as sergeant 26 years later.

"I never wanted to be high up in the hierarchy in terms of rank. I was able to accomplish quite a bit as a sergeant," De Foster said. "My mentor became the chief, and my plans were to retire and move to Bandera."

She said she became attached to the Lone Star State while attending training in Dallas. She visited the Hill Country with some friends, and "just fell in love."

“As soon as I got here, I felt like I was home,” she said, adding her retirement to Bandera was more than a decade in the making.

In 2019, two weeks after her retirement, she and her husband planted their roots in Bandera County, and built their forever home. Earlier this year, she celebrated her granddaughter’s birth here. The decision to come out of retirement was, in part, at the prompting of several friends, who suggested she throw her hat in the ring when the position for marshal became available.

“I had to think long and hard, and discuss it with my family,” De Foster said. “I had the training and experience to do the job. I realized I had an opportunity to give back to my community.”

Recently endorsed by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement, De Foster’s next step is to take her peace officer’s exam within six months. Once she completes that, with her experience, she will hold her Master Peace Officer’s license.

Her list of things to accomplish within the Marshal’s Office includes increasing transparency, digitizing records, and improving organizational efficiency, specifically in the evidence and property rooms - an area already identified as needing improvement by former interim marshal Rusty Pancoast.

“We are lacking in some systems that need to be established, organized and digitized,” De Foster said, who is applying the same urgency to update, review and amend existing policies that will bring the Marshal’s Office into compliance with the Texas Police Chiefs Association accreditation program (TPCAF).

The TPCAF offers unique accreditation for Texas, and awards certification to public safety agencies that voluntarily meet certain professional standards and best practices. De Foster is already familiar with CALEA (the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies) in Hawaii, and the benefits - such as increased community advocacy, greater accountability within the agency, and written directives that provide guidance for policies, procedures, facilities and operations - are similar in Texas.

“Under my administration, our office is going to be transparent. I think that will help to repair the trust issues between our office and the community,” De Foster said. “I think there is some healing that needs to happen, and it’s not going to happen overnight.”

Another goal, which De Foster said is already happening, is cross training deputies and staff.

“It’s very common to have a single point of failure in governmental agencies. If a person who is the only expert in something is gone, things come to a screeching halt,” she said. “We’re going to remove the single point of failure aspect from the Marshal’s Office.”

Along those lines, De Foster said she is currently training a qualified successor. The Marshal’s Office has four full-time deputies - including Chief Deputy Earl Heidelberg, and four reserve deputies, plus civilian support from other city offices.

De Foster said she discussed her intention with the mayor and city council members, committing to at least five years in the marshal’s position.

“I liked being retired,” De Foster said. “This is my community, and now I want to give back while I can.”