

Police inspector retires

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Ruston Police Department Inspector Jay Kavanaugh said for him, the job hasn't been about catching criminals — rather the prize has been helping people.

Kavanaugh is retiring Friday after working at RPD in law enforcement for 32 years and nine months.

Kavanaugh said when the late Don Hammon, former RPD chief of police, hired him at age 19, Hammon's philosophy was that officers are in the people-helping business, a notion Kavanaugh said he has never forgotten.

"My favorite thing about the job was helping people," he said. "We're not there to see how many people we can put

See KAVANAUGH, page 2

Say farewell

There will be a reception for RPD Inspector Jay Kavanaugh at 2 p.m. Friday at the Ruston Civic Center in the Peach Suite. The public is invited to attend.

Kavanaugh recalls experiences

Continued from page 1

in jail or see how many tickets we can write; we're there to help people."

Kavanaugh said there have been many days that included exciting cases, but there were thousands of days of just helping people.

"It may not be that a law was broken. If somebody had a problem, it was gratifying to me if I was able to help them with that problem," he said. "I like that kind of stuff."

Kavanaugh said he started working at the department as a dispatcher.

"Two weeks after I turned 21, Hammon put me on the street as a patrolman, and I worked there for four years," he said.

Kavanaugh, who graduated from then Northeast Louisiana University in 1977, said he was one of the first officers at the department to graduate from a criminal justice program. He started working in investigations in 1980.

"I've been there ever since," he said.

Always on call

Kavanaugh said the job is 24 hours a day, because he's on call after he leaves the office.

"You don't have any off-duty hours," he said. "When you're an investigator in a small department, you're always subject to being called back in, and that's kind of played into my decision to retire. I think the timing's just right for me to go. I'm tired of jumping every time the phone rings."

Kavanaugh said his family has had to endure his hours also, as he emphasized he could never schedule events or plan trips with the family.

"So who's suffered the most out of all this is my family. It was harder on them probably than it was on me," he said. "It's hard to plan something when you don't know what you're gonna be doing five minutes later.

"I've missed birthdays, Christmases; every conceivable holiday at some point and time during these 32 years has been messed up because I've been called out to work a crime."

One of these crimes that called Kavanaugh away from his family was on a Sunday two decades ago. Kavanaugh had returned home from hunting to watch one of his children, while his wife took their other, child to the doctor. Not long after, he was called to work.

"In the early 1980s, we had a hostage situation at a local motel," Kavanaugh said. "I was the negotiator."

Kavanaugh said the suspect, Dwight Riser, who was wanted for rape in Houston and was on the run, took two housekeepers hostage. The situation lasted approximately 12 hours.

"The hostage situation ended when the hostage taker decided to marry one of the hostages, and I set up a fake marriage over the phone," Kavanaugh said. "After we did this faux marriage, he let them go and surrendered. That was one of the weirdest situations that turned out good for a hostage situation."

In this high-stakes scenario, Kavanaugh was simply grateful the two female victims involved were not hurt.

"That was a big day," Kavanaugh said, adding that because of his experience with this type of situation, he was featured in a one-hour interactive NBC *Dateline* special on hostage situations, along with RPD Assistant Chief of Police Jim Hilton.

Master of many trades

Kavanaugh said he's seen every bad thing that's happened in Ruston in the last 32 years.

In another incident, he said

three men from Gary, Ind., robbed Ruston State Bank.

"I went to work at 8 o'clock. I got home Sunday morning at two and had been to Charleston, Ill., in the process, where the guys were caught," he said.



Kavanaugh

Kavanaugh said as a result of this incident, Johnny Maxwell, then president of Ruston State Bank, made the donation that started the Crimestoppers program at RPD.

"Arising out of that case, Maxwell donated the seed money that got the Ruston/Lincoln Crimestoppers off the ground," he said, adding he's been the police coordinator of the program since its inception.

In addition to investigator and Crimestoppers police coordinator, Kavanaugh is a licensed polygraph examiner and served as chairman of the Louisiana Polygraph Board, a board appointed by the governor to oversee the licensing of polygraph examiners. Additionally, he is trained in criminal profiling, psychological profiling, statement/content analysis and analytical investigations and also handled press releases for the department before the public information officer position was designated.

He has also been to the FBI fingerprint school for fingerprint identification and has been recognized in numerous courts in Louisiana and Texas as an expert witness in the field of fingerprint examination.

Kavanaugh said polygraph tests are used to screen RPD applicants, as well as to rule out people who may be suspected of a crime. He has even done tests for police departments and district attorneys in other jurisdictions.

"I've had two incidents where people were actually charged

with murder," he said. "I was called in to assist with the case, polygraphed them and told the case agent that I didn't think they did it.

"After further investigation, another person was arrested and ultimately convicted of the crime."

Kavanaugh said the truth is paramount to him.

"I don't ever want to let someone that wasn't guilty of something get charged," he said. "That's pretty special any time you can determine someone's been falsely accused and see that they're not convicted for something they didn't do."

Life after RDP Investigations

Kavanaugh, who was born and raised in Ruston and still lives in Lincoln Parish, owns his own polygraph instrument and said he plans to continue working with agencies doing polygraph tests through his business, Kavanaugh Polygraph Services, after he retires.

Kavanaugh said he's also considering getting a private investigator's license and working for attorneys doing private investigative work.

Kavanaugh's work has taken him to Maryland, Illinois, Texas and Arkansas. During his years at the department, he has seen a lot of things change. When Kavanaugh started with investigations, there were three investigators. Back then, they worked everything there was to work.

Now, there are two juvenile, one forgery/white collar, two narcotics and three other criminal investigators.

He remembers his years with the RPD fondly and said he owes a lot of people for his success.

"I've enjoyed working with everybody," Kavanaugh said. "I can't say I've enjoyed every minute of it, but who does."