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Wheat Ridge Selects Chris Murtha As Its Next Police Chief

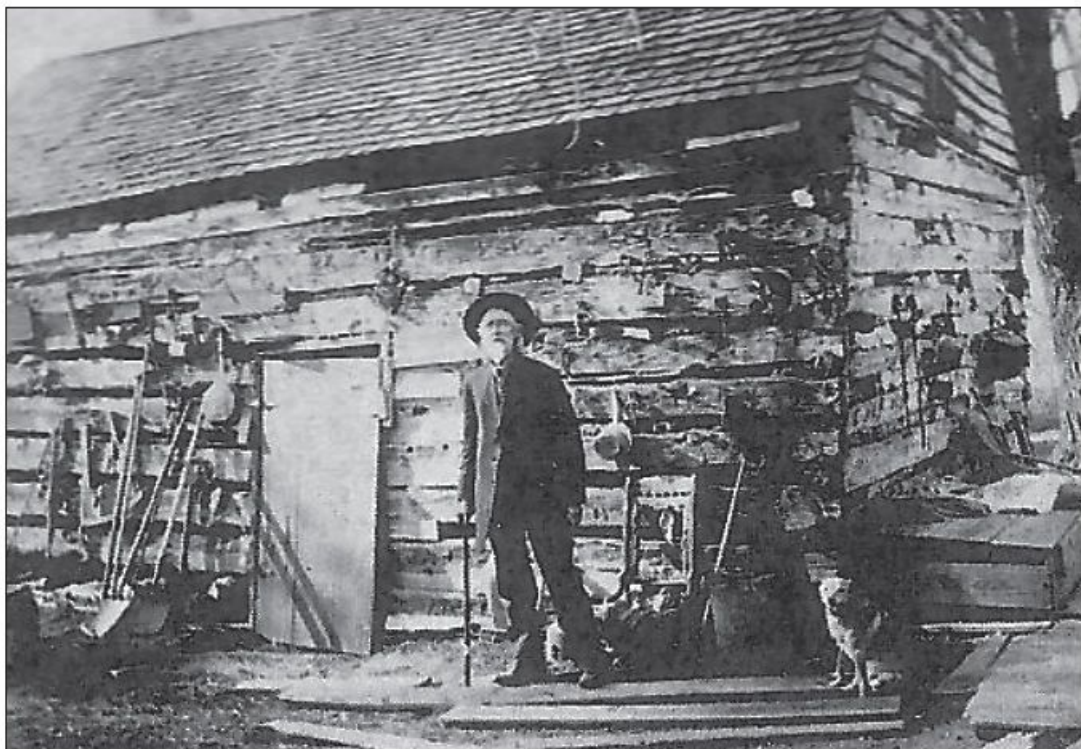
■ By Mike McKibbin

A former Colorado resident and 23-year law enforcement veteran has been chosen to head up the City of Wheat Ridge's more than 100-member police department.

City Manager Patrick Goff selected Chris Murtha as the next police chief over Colorado native and Arapahoe County Sheriffs Department Bureau Chief Vince Line, who were among over 80 applicants. The two were the finalists for the position vacated when Dan Brennan retired in July. Goff named Dave Pickett as interim police chief until the position is filled.

Currently a deputy chief for the patrol bureau of Prince George's County Police Department in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, Murtha has accepted a conditional offer pending final background screenings, Goff said in a Jan. 3 news release. Murtha is scheduled to start his new job on Feb. 10.

Goff called Murtha "an exceptional leader" with "a proven track record of reducing crime through an innovative



BOYD CABIN IS THE EARLIEST RECORDED RESIDENCE IN WHEAT RIDGE, and today is still standing in the Wheat Ridge Historical Park at 4610 Robb St. COURTESY WHEAT RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Chris Murtha

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and collaborative approach to community policing.”

Now working in a department of 1,100 men and women, Goff noted Murtha was instrumental in the adoption of a new records management system, automated speed enforcement and license plate readers.

Murtha received his bachelor's degree in political science from the University of New Hampshire and a certificate from the Police Executive Research Forum's Senior Management Institute for Police.

At a Dec. 18 community forum with Line and Murtha, Goff said community stakeholders, city employees, residents and business leaders identified qualities they wanted to see in the next police chief of the 9.5-square-mile city.

“They wanted someone who will embrace the community and address issues such as homelessness and crime, especially in city parks and along the (Interstate 70-Kipling Street) corridor,” Goff stated. “They wanted someone who will bring a proactive approach to reducing crime and focus on community-oriented approaches to public safety.”

City staff and employees listed a moderate, inclusive and collaborative leadership approach that values employee input, he added.

Murtha, who said he and his wife are former Denver residents anxious to return to the Front Range, noted that in his talks with Wheat Ridge department leaders, he was left with the impression “that the problems here are no different than those in the big city departments, other than the scale.”



CHRIS MURTHA, CURRENTLY A DEPUTY CHIEF FOR THE PATROL BUREAU of Prince George's County Police Department in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, has been selected as the next Wheat Ridge police chief. PHOTO COURTESY PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT

“Why I joined community service was to solve problems and I think my skills and experience have helped me be able to deal with just about anything thrown at me,” he added.

Murtha called immigration a federal issue, so “the day you see ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) officers directing traffic on Wadsworth is the day we start enforcing civil immigration laws.”

Establishing trust with a community begins with patrol officers, Murtha added, since they are the most noticed faces of a department.

“They're the first to respond to incidents, so it's important we get it right with those people,” he said. “I value patrol officers immensely. What we put on the street is our face and that should always reflect the community.”