

## A Look Back at a Remarkable Career

By Eddie Reyes, Deputy Chief, Alexandria, Virginia, Police Department

**A**s a membership organization, IACP's success depends heavily on the contributions of its members. Over the years, we have been fortunate to have a very active membership of committed volunteers who have helped make IACP the world-class organization it is today. Few, however, can match the contributions of Chief McEwen, who will be stepping down as chair of the IACP Communications and Technology Committee at the IACP Annual Conference and Exposition in Chicago, Illinois, this month (October 2015). His contributions have helped enhance the standing of IACP as the voice of law enforcement and will continue to have a positive impact on public safety for decades to come. Chief McEwen's long career in law enforcement began in 1957, when he became a police officer in his hometown of Waverly, New York. When he received his first appointment as chief of police in 1972 in the town of Cayuga Heights, New York, he immediately joined IACP, beginning a membership that would continue for more than four decades. Chief McEwen was named chair of the Communications and Technology Committee by IACP President Wilson E. "Pat" Spier in 1978 and has been reappointed by every president since.

Through the years, Chief McEwen has served as a police officer, a corrections officer, a deputy sheriff, a chief of police, the Deputy Director of the New York State Bureau of Municipal Police, the Deputy Commissioner of the New York Bureau of Criminal Justice, and, in 1996, he was sworn in as the Deputy Assistant Director of the Communications and Technology Branch of the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services Division (CJIS) by Director Louis Freeh.

In 2000, Chief McEwen "retired from being paid. Since then, I've been a full-time volunteer for the IACP," he chuckled in a recent conversation, "working more hours than I've ever worked."

Chief McEwen bought his first receiver to monitor police radio while in high school in a small central New York town in the 1950s; soon after, he was accompanying the volunteer fire company and helping with the radio. He was always fascinated with emergency communications, an interest that followed him throughout his career. In fact, the first major technological advance Chief McEwen experienced involved radios.

When he started in patrol, very few mobile radios were available, and they were large, heavy boxes with a telephone handset and a long whip antenna. "It wasn't until about the mid-60s before the handheld portables came out." He continued, "The radio world has evolved. In those days, some of the first transistors were being used to be able to make smaller handheld devices, batteries lasted longer... and then, of course, in the 80s we started moving to digital from analog radio; that was a big change."

Communication technology is still evolving. "I've been involved in the development of radio over all those years, to the point where now everything is pretty much digital. Some of that is good, some of it's bad. It has not been a perfect world transitioning from analog to digital."

But Chief McEwen is enthusiastic about the future of communications technology. "Now you have the combination of computers and radios... with Internet Protocol you can pretty much patch one radio system to another. You can talk worldwide—you can talk on a portable radio through an Internet connection to someone in Europe or in Asia or across the country or in the next county. All those developments have occurred during my lifetime, and it's been pretty exciting."

Chief McEwen also recalled some of his early experiences with computers. In the 1980s, his introduction to DOS workstations did not go well.

*I remember when I went to Albany to be the Deputy Commissioner of Criminal Justice, they brought a new desktop computer to my office, installed it, and tried to educate me on how to use it. I learn by doing; I'm not good at listening to people tell me how to do things. They wanted to say, "Well, you've got to learn all these keystrokes"—you know, you've got to hit F3 to do this, XY to do that... I said "I'll never remember all that. I'm too busy right now."*

*But when I went to Ithaca as police chief in 1988 that was just about the time Windows came out. You had the mouse, and you had point-and-click, and you didn't have to remember the keystrokes, and when I saw that I just fell in love with computers and began to teach myself.*

Chief McEwen soon realized that computers could bring efficiencies to his police operations. He began to replace the old manual typewriters his officers were using to type their reports.

*Shortly after, maybe a month, the district attorney called me and said, "Chief, what have you done to your officers and their report writing?" They used to get reports that had holes punched in them from the a's and o's of the manual typewriters, and there would be errors with white-out to cover it up, and the reports were a mess. He said, "Now I get them, they're all spelled right, they're neat," and I said, "I bought these new machines with spell-check."*

*Just think about what that alone has achieved, because police officers weren't hired because they*



Harlin McEwen is stepping down after 36 years of leadership [as chair] of the Communications & Technology Committee



Chief Harlin McEwen, Ithaca, New York, 1988

*were stenographers or typists. They didn't know how to type—they were terrible at it!*

For all his accomplishments, however, Chief McEwen will probably be best remembered for his critical role representing the IACP and the larger public safety community in the struggle for a dedicated radio spectrum for emergency communications. He started working on securing the spectrum in 1995, while still chief of police in Ithaca.

*The president of the IACP at the time and I went over to visit with the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission to try to convince him of the need for more spectrum for police. The meeting didn't go particularly well, and I won't go into details, but as a result of that we got the attention of Congress, and Congress then directed the FCC to address the problem.*

*There was a committee appointed, of which I was a member... the result of that was that we recommended that public safety needed 97.5 MHz additional spectrum for the next 25 years. It was an urgent need. So in 1997 Congress directed the FCC to give us 24 MHz of spectrum, which was the spectrum that came from the transition of analog television to digital television...that was an amazing action on the part of Congress.*

But the Congressional action was just the beginning. Another committee was formed to determine how to best utilize the spectrum. (It was decided to dedicate 12 MHz each to voice and data.) As the technology evolved, it soon became apparent that 12 MHz for data would not be sufficient for new broadband applications, so Chief McEwen and his coalition of public safety colleagues began advocating for the additional, adjacent spectrum, the D-Block.

Chief McEwen carefully explained the complicated process that followed. "Eventually, what happened is they had an auction, and the FCC put certain rules in place to require whoever bought the D-Block to work with public safety to give us the additional spectrum we needed to make it possible for us to have a reasonable system."

However, the auction, held in 2008, failed to result in a sale because of the strict conditions attached by the FCC.

"We then began advocating that Congress give us the D-Block—just give it to us outright and let us work on how to build out the system. For four years, we had meetings and discussions on the Hill and with all kinds of people about the D-Block. We put on a big push to get the D-Block allocated to public safety."

The years of hard work paid off. The Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Recovery Act of 2012 (also known as the Spectrum Act) was enacted and signed into law by U.S. President Obama on February 22, 2012. It directed the FCC to allocate the D-Block for a national public safety broadband network and established the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) with up to \$7 billion to build out the network. Chief McEwen is excited by the potential benefits it will bring to public safety. "FirstNet will allow us to do the things that Hollywood leads the public to believe we're already doing, such as sending text, photos, voice communications, and videos to all field units on handheld devices across multiple disciplines and state lines."

Today, Chief McEwen is continuing to work on the issues surrounding implementation of the program through FirstNet, and it is not without challenges. "[Seven billion dollars] is a lot of money; it's a wonderful thing because we needed it, but it's not enough to build this network... so we have to build partnerships and figure out how to finance this. And that's what's going on now. At the end of the day, the challenges are still fairly significant."

When Chief McEwen officially relinquishes the reins of the Communications and Technology Committee at the committee meeting in Chicago on October 25, 2015, it does not mean he is retreating to a retirement in central New York. He will continue to represent the IACP on the Public Safety Advisory Committee, which advises the FirstNet board.

On a personal note, I'm extremely grateful and proud to have been selected to succeed Chief McEwen as the chair of the IACP Communications and Technology Committee. Chief McEwen has left an incredible legacy in his 36 years as the chair of the IACP Communications and Technology Committee. I look forward to the challenge of moving our profession forward with the same collaboration and spirit that Chief McEwen leaves behind. ♦

**The incoming chair of the IACP Communications and Technology Committee, Deputy Chief Eddie Reyes has been with the Alexandria, Virginia, Police Department for nearly 25 years.**

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