

Chat with the Chief, a Conversation with Chief Richard Wiley, West Melbourne, Florida

By Karen Fleming

Chief Wiley was a PAL Kid!

Growing up in Philadelphia, Richard Wiley was the youngest of four children in a fatherless household, with a hard-working waitress mother and a live-in grandmother. In Philadelphia there were about twenty-five PAL centers, all located in city recreation centers. Chief Wiley's mother signed his brother and him up for the free PAL after-school care.

"She was smart," the chief said. "I didn't realize I was poor. I knew we didn't have a lot of money, but I realize my mom was really struggling with one income, and she was very proud—she wouldn't go on welfare.

"When I was about fourteen, my school gave me a scholarship to the Germantown YMCA, where I played sports and became an after-school counselor. Part of my success was PAL and the Germantown Y.

"The thing about PAL is that it's not only a place where you're keeping kids busy being productive, it also changes their personality.

Your personality changes because of your interaction with positive things in your life. The more positive things that occur in your life, the more positive a person you become. For me, all the interaction I had with sports and things as simple as learning to play chess helped. Something as simple as learning how to play chess is a big deal. That's something I've carried with me my whole life. A lot of people can't play chess, but I learned when I was seven or eight years old in PAL. That's what we did in the after-school care, even checkers, ping pong and pool—little things people play that make you a better person.

"That's what Leslee [Brimer, executive director of West Melbourne PAL] and I talk about: after school care, getting the kids involved in sports—it's sort of like opening up the door for them to succeed. We don't want anybody to fail—ever.

“We’re looking to make our PAL in West Melbourne a big deal,” the chief said. “We already have a building for our after-school care and the youth program, and we’re looking to partner with a church down the street for their facility. Leslee has been very active; I was driving by my station last Saturday, and she was out there with the PAL youth doing a car wash and a garage sale.

“We’re planning on starting a partnership with the Brevard County Plasma Baseball Association. They already play at our fields and are actively involved in our PAL programs also. That’s the kind of stuff we want to continue to do—it’s a no-brainer. We already have kids who know each other that are involved in organized sports. That’s what PAL does.”

About the Chief

Chief Richard Wiley, from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, earned his Master’s Degree in Public Safety Administration from St. Joseph’s University. He was employed in law enforcement in Pennsylvania for more than thirty years, most of that time with the Philadelphia Police Department, achieving the rank of Police Staff Inspector. He retired from the Philadelphia Police Department in 2005 to become chief of police in Lower Swatera Township, a town of 10,000 in Pennsylvania. On September 9, 2012, he was sworn in as chief of police for West Melbourne Florida. Chief Wiley is married to Gigi, and they have two children and two grandchildren. The chief and his wife enjoy Florida’s climate, its beaches, and the nearby Disney attractions.

A New Police Chief for West Melbourne

The West Melbourne Police Department looks and feels different these days. A little more than a year ago Chief Richard Wiley came to West Melbourne and “hit the ground” running.

“If you’re looking for someone to maintain the status quo,” he had told the interview committee, “I’m not your guy. I’m the sort of individual who can’t sit still. I’m going to go forward.

“I came into a department [in West Melbourne] where my predecessor had been for over thirty years,” Chief Wiley said. “During those

years, the population of West Melbourne has exploded; we're close to 20,000 now. The city has grown rapidly, and has gone from a sleepy little town to a very vibrant one with lots of businesses, major employers, and new developments.

"The first thing I did was conduct a complete and thorough analysis of the department to identify its strong points and weak points. I looked at the weak points and tried to make improvements, and the strong points to make them stronger. It gave me a base line to understand the pulse of the department.

"I'm in a department that was ripe for change," the chief said, "and as a result, that helped me facilitate the changes I envisioned. I was looking to make major improvements in the facility, the vehicles, and the officers' training. This was not an accredited department, and we're now in the process of going through that accreditation with the State of Florida. That's a pretty big deal for this department. We now have an accreditation manager I appointed since I've been here.

"Basically, in a nutshell," Chief Wiley said, "we've changed the look of the department. We've refurbished the whole building, got rid of the old, broken stuff, painted, carpeted, bought new furniture, reorganized, restructured who goes where, and made sense out of it so it flowed better. The supervisors have their own private area; now there is a real Roll Call room and a training room; the detectives have their own interview room within their offices, and the cell room has its own secured interview room, which it never had before."

"I've gotten tremendous support from my city council and my manager. Here's the pretty impressive part of this: because of readjustments in some budgetary issues, people leaving—because of attrition or whatever, we were able to make all these changes within that budget, which I didn't even have a hand in [drafting]. We got a lot of the *must-haves* done my first year.

Changes, Goals, New Directions

Four areas of Chief Wiley's initial evaluation of the department received critical review: Fairness, Training, Recognition, and Working conditions, or FTRW, as he calls it. "They are directly related to the officers'

morale and the spirit of the department, the *esprit de corps*,” the chief said.

“I wanted to make sure that (1) we’re being fair with our officers, not only treating them in a certain way, but also making sure we have discipline within our department. You want to make sure the officers are doing their job and you want to give them the tools to do it. Which brings us to (2) training. We didn’t have a training coordinator before, so I reorganized the department, shifted things around and started a training unit with a full-time training officer who has all the credentials to do a training program for the entire department.

“Another thing I revamped was the Field Training Evaluation Program (FTEP). I rewrote the policy, extended the training, and incorporated an in-service training where the [ones in training] didn’t even leave the building during the first thirty days. That included a lot of classroom instruction coupled with hands-on training.

“Then they went through four phases after that which incorporated the officers riding along with an experienced Field Training Officer so they could be trained properly and have their training documented throughout. That training program was reengineered so that we were giving the officers more time to train and being sure they were going to be successful in training.

“The other thing we did was look at our external training. The training coordinator was charged with looking outside the department so that oftentimes we could get training for free.”

(3) Recognition was a very important factor in keeping people’s morale high and motivating them,” Chief Wiley said. “I basically looked at improving the recognition program they already had by charging the Awards’ Board Committee to look at the officers daily activities more critically. Officers that deserve recognition should get it. Ones that are doing their job need pats on the back also. So we would do an Officer of the Month, Quarter and Year. We put an officer’s picture and a plaque with a memorandum of why they received a recognition, and we posted this in our lobby and in our roll call room. We changed the awards: now we actually give them out. By adding a new seal and new background, it makes it more official. Officers cherish those awards when they get them, and they want their families to see them.

“Another thing we did was start formal roll calls,” Chief Wiley said. “It doesn’t sound like a big deal, but before they didn’t do a proper roll call, in my opinion. Now we have formal inspection.

Into the Digital Age

“We now do Power Document Management Systems (DMS), which is an IT type of program. That was a new program we introduced along with the accreditation. Everyone has to sign off that they received training, digitally. They go on our web site, and every piece of paper is now done digitally. The sergeants are required to do a *pass-down* from one shift to the next, and the detectives are required to do crime bulletins on every crime committed in our city. That’s given out in Power DMS.

“We instituted an internal affairs program called *IA Pro*. It’s a software program used by police departments across the country. It tracks all our officers, all complaints, and it keeps everything secured in a professional environment versus putting things in a filing cabinet and losing them. So, I revamped that along with my command structure. My deputy chief is in charge of all internal affairs investigations, and he is the highest ranking officer besides me in the department.

An Officer’s Car is His Office

“Here’s the big thing I did,” the chief said. “We looked at our equipment and our patrol cars. The officer’s car is his office. In Florida, just about every officer gets a take-home vehicle. It’s one of the privileges, and they’re lucky to get it down here. A lot of other agencies don’t have it.

“So, we have over forty-five vehicles, and the majority of them are on patrol. I did research on our vehicles and determined we had to get rid of twenty cars, which is a lot. We decided that patrol was the most important part of our department and its backbone. We wanted to give all new vehicles and all new equipment to the officers on patrol. We decided that could purchase three or four cars a year, and that would cost about \$100,000. I also looked at a “lease to own” and found out we could get twenty cars for the same amount as buying three or four cars a year for the

next six years. It didn't change my budget at all; it actually cost less money because we bought things in bulk.

"It wasn't easy convincing my city manager and the city council to buy twenty cars at one time. That was something that took a lot of research on my part. I had to get all the documents together, and a lot of work went into those documents. I had to meet independently with my council and my manager to convince them that this is the most intelligent approach that any police department can take when they're purchasing equipment that they purchase annually anyway. I was fortunate [to win them over] in that I was a new chief, and that helped too, a little bit.

"So now the officers have new cars. We redesigned the look of them: they're black and white Dodge Chargers and everybody thinks they're cool-looking cars—they look like Batman cars.

"It's changed the department completely because other agencies in Brevard County are envious of what we have. [To lease] is not a complicated way to do it. I think it's the best approach, but to change people's mindsets on how to buy things and do things is hard. It's a different approach, and they're not used to it.

"Here's the nice part about it: next year I don't have to ask for cars. I've got six years I don't have to ask for any patrol cars. What I didn't tell you is that I have other cars I've got to replace. I want to adopt a similar plan for those cars.

Planning for the Long Term

"Those other cars that need replacing will be part of a *Five Year Strategic Plan* I'm developing now. [This plan] is something that City Council is expecting me to do, and they know the cars will be part of that. I want to craft the document so it will be functional, and the goals will be attainable and realistic. I'd like to have that completed within the next twelve months and adopted. To me, that's important because it gives the department a blueprint to follow for the next five years.

"Oftentimes a lot of organizations lack direction. Now that I've got a lot of the short term stuff out of the way, it's time to plan for the long term. You know how it is with budgets; everybody thinks that things are good ideas, but when it comes time to spend the money to do them, there's no

money. If you can get people to buy in early on, to adopt what you want to do, it becomes feasible and realistic.”

Let’s Meet!

“I’ve put in a lot of long hours, and there’ve been a lot of meetings,” Chief Wiley said. “In fact, every time my command staff sees me, they run for cover, because they think I’m going to call for another conference. But you’ve got to meet to get things done, to make sure everyone’s on the same page.

“One of the big things I’ve done is start a Crime Meeting. Crime is an important component in every police department. My Criminal Investigation Division meets with myself, my deputy chief and the captain, and we review every crime that is reported to them. We go over every case to understand what’s going on in the city, looking for trends, for spikes, for patterns, to see if we can intelligently address those patterns and crimes. We’ve solved a lot of crimes based on those meetings. Our clearance rate went up 10%-- pretty significant in one year!

“I think of this as if someone did this crime to my family, or against me, and I want my detectives to have that same empathy, to realize that when you’re investigating a crime, it’s very personal to that person.”

What is an important thing for a chief to remember?

“An important thing is that we have the responsibility to provide good service, not only to our employees, but to the entire city, and people in the community need to feel that the police department is servicing them. Every complaint that comes down the pike, we’re going to look at and address, and that’s a very difficult thing to do because one person’s perspective on what should be done is not the same as another’s.

“People come in here, and Kathy [Wilson], my administrative assistant, tells me so and so wants to speak to me, and I take the call. People come to the lobby and want to speak to the chief—I’ll speak with them. [Kathy] was stunned when I first got here and I’d talk to people like that. Just that little conversation you have with people goes a long way. It means the world to people.

“I want my officers to feel that way, too,” the chief said. “We send out about fifteen random survey cards every month to crime victims, and we ask, ‘How did you feel about the service the officer provided? Was he courteous?’ We usually get back about half the cards, and every card comes back positive. That speaks volumes because if you’re upset by the way an officer’s handled something, you’re usually going to make a complaint. I have gotten complaints, but usually very few.

“The big thing with police officers is how they treat people that they interact with. What I want is for my officers to please treat people, even bad people, with dignity. There’s a whole different side of criminals. I’ve even come to like some of the ones I’ve gotten involved with, even if they’ve done some horrible things. They are people, and they deserve to be treated in a professional manner.”

Chief Wiley always tries to set a good example for those he’s leading. “If the top of the organization doesn’t do a good job, then the whole organization suffers for it. I come in wearing my uniform every day and try to look professional. I send the message out that we need to work harder. I can take a marginal employee, and with the proper supervision, discipline and training, make him exceptional. What matters is the support and training they get that makes them a better police officer

“That’s always been my approach, even as a young sergeant. I realized that early on from my mentors. Support your officers; don’t drive around trying to catch them doing wrong; catch them doing right. I don’t like the “F” word: Failure. So I try never to use that with my officers. I want to put the round peg in the round hole, so we’ve made a lot of changes here internally, with officers and assignments to make people fit in better.

Law Enforcement: *The Best Profession in the World*

“I became a police officer at age twenty,” Chief Wiley said. “There’s nothing like it in the world. You think about the good you can do.” The chief looks back on the lives he’s touched, and lives that have touched him, and finds deep satisfaction in his choice of professions. He is dedicated to doing an excellent job in West Melbourne. It is evident that that is already happening. We wish him a long and successful tenure there.

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