

## LAW ENFORCEMENT

# Reflections on a trail-blazing career

**Leading up to her retirement in June after 40 years on the force, Chandler Police Chief Sherry Kiyler looks back on changes in law enforcement, and kicking open the door as a 'police woman'**

By Michelle Reese  
TRIBUNE

Chandler Police Chief Sherry Kiyler's "from the front" leadership the past nine years inspired a police force and helped build collaboration among East Valley safety departments, according to those who have worked with her. As Kiyler prepared to retire in June after 40 years in law enforcement, she said her hope is she's left a contribution to the community.

"I didn't come here to make it a better place. I came here to hopefully make a contribution. When I came here there were things that had to get done. A lot had to do with the significant growth that had occurred and was still occurring," she said.

The time is right, she said, as she marked her 40-year milestone in January, crime rates are down, the budget is done for the city and the new fiscal year is about to begin. Plus, since her husband retired a few years ago and they're both in good health, they want to spend more time with their "amazing" children and grandchildren.

"You don't know what life is going to be. It's time to go and explore those things that we haven't been able to because we've been working,

and working a lot of hours," she said.

Kiyler started in the 1970s as a "police woman" with the Phoenix Police Department. Then, the doors were just opening for women. She was issued a skirt with her uniform, along with a purse to carry her 2-inch revolver and handcuffs.

If she wanted pants, she had to get them on her own.

But Kiyler's determination brought her promotions and advancement, even leading the department's homicide unit.

Much has changed since then in terms of gender equity, she said.

"Forty years ago nobody expected to see women all the places we were. For years, even after we were involved in patrol activities, you would not have seen a woman SWAT team officer or patrol officer. That has all changed," she said. "We have truly become integrated. You simply have to be qualified to do the job. You have to work hard.

There's lots of competition for everything, but all jobs are now open to everyone."

The other change has been in "tools and technology" to get the job done, she said.

"When I started as a sworn officer in 1973, we didn't have portable radios, computers in

#### EDITOR'S NOTE:

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After 40 years of experience as a police officer, Chief Sherry Kiyler recently retired from the Chandler Police Department. [Ana Ramirez/Special to Tribune]

the car, bulletproof vests. Our information was only as good as what was told from one officer to another as they were going off shift," she said. "Our training was good. The tools of our trade were there. But they were nothing like what they are today. The changes were phenomenal. We used to hang our radio mic outside of our car and hope we could get back for help."

"What has not changed is the job we do. The burglary is still a burglary. A crime is still a crime. Police response is still police response."

Assistant police chief David Neuman, who will take over as interim police chief on June 30, said Kiyler's impact goes beyond Chandler.

"When she came, she really reached out to the other

agencies and got us involved," he said. "Part of our strategic plan, working partnerships and relationships, has allowed us to do more things. It's worked very well for us."

Kiyler pointed to the East Valley Gang and Criminal Information Fusion Center, which opened in 2007, as a place where police agencies can share information with each other, as well as with state and federal groups.

"When I started in this business, we were expected to do it all, have all the answers and do it in our own communities. We learned that we don't always know what's best. We have to partner with our community about what are the crime issues and the social issues we need to address. We've learned we all need

the resources, but we don't all need the same resources," she said.

In terms of a rewarding career, Kiyler said nothing tops police work.

"Every day we get to get up and do something that makes a difference. One way or another, the people who work in this profession are going

to make an impact every day," she said. "People never call us when they're having a good day. They're calling us because it's possibly the worst day of their lives. Maybe they've been burglarized or had their life threatened or children lost. The responsibility we have is from the moment that phone rings until it's over. ... That responsibility is huge, particularly for people on the street wearing the uniform. They are constantly being judged and represent an organization and profession."

But the "rewards are huge," she said. "We get to save lives. We get to catch bad people."

When Kiyler talks to young people about a future in the field, she's quick to inform them that their actions today can impact opportunities available tomorrow.

"You can do things as a teenager or in your early 20s that will disqualify you from not only this profession, but many others. I think sometimes our young people don't consider consequences. What you do today, truly, truly impacts what you do tomorrow," she said.

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## Chamber

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On the other hand, Tilque said the fact that she's a woman is immaterial to her duties as a chamber head, while Kimble said it really isn't that big of an issue for her either.

"I don't see it as a male/female issue, I see it as a business-leader issue," Kimble said.

Regardless of the individual circumstances, the roles Harrison, Kimble, Miller, Tilque and Gill play in their respective organizations are indicative of a larger trend in which women are taking more leadership positions in chambers

across the country.

Miller compared the rise in female chamber leaders to the notion that nonprofit organizations have historically been run by women. And in the chamber realm, women have long held leadership roles in the smaller, non-metropolitan areas, with Tilque adding those smaller chambers often pay less than comparable jobs. That's actually one of the main reasons she became president of the Gilbert Chamber — the town's economic boom started shortly after she took over; and she said she would have been far less likely to ascend to the position had it been anywhere

near the size it is now.

A final major proponent of the move toward female-led chambers is a reflection of society itself, as the view of women's role in business has changed in the last few decades. Miller said she thinks Arizona has been ahead of the curve a bit when it comes to embracing the trend, which she said is rooted in the state's relative newness and inability to develop overly-dominant networks of men.

Attaining a leadership position in business isn't as daunting as it used to be for women, although Miller said one of the main movements that presented many of the opportuni-

ties seen today is neglected or outright shunned by some in the modern generation.

"I'm a feminist from way back, and I'm of an age — I'm 55 years old — when I hear younger women talk about 'well, I'm not a feminist, it's troubling (in how they say it),' Miller said. "... To me being a feminist means a woman can do what she wants, what she thinks is best for her situation."

"If she wants to run a company, great, if she wants to stay at home with her kids, that's great."

• Brett Fera contributed to this report.

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