

McKinley County undersheriff discusses career, department changes, motivations

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
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In his 19 years of service to Gallup and McKinley County, James Maiorano has been through numerous commanders, changes to the community, and evolutions in the law enforcement process.

The *Sun* recently sat down with Maiorano to discuss his storied career.

BACKGROUND

Maiorano was born outside of Philadelphia, Pa. and moved to the Gallup area with his parents in 1991. His parents worked as missionaries for Western Indian Ministries in Tse Bonito, where Maiorano attended school and finished with his GED when he was 16.

The bible college Maiorano planned to attend in San Antonio accepted him when he was 17. There he met a woman. The couple later returned to Gallup, married and had two children.

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While this marriage ended in divorce sometime later, his two children are now 17 and 18 years old.

Maiorano will celebrate his 13th anniversary with his second wife in December. The two have raised five children. This past May, his wife's oldest daughter gave birth to Maiorano's first grandson.

When asked what spurred him to take up police work, Maiorano recalled a moment from his youth.

"When I was little in Pennsylvania, there was one time where a state trooper was at the intersection directing traffic where we crossed to go to school," Maiorano said. "I thought that was the neatest thing, the most prestigious thing, I ever saw."

Despite having no other family in law enforcement, Maiorano applied to the Gallup Police Department in 2000 and passed the physical test and psychological exam.

"It was a new thing, a big adventure for me," Maiorano said. "I'm glad [the Gallup Police Department] gave me the opportunity."

CAREER STEPS

After spending nearly a year as an uncertified officer with the Gallup Police Department, Maiorano attended UNM-Gallup with a focus on criminal justice from Jan. to May 2001, and received his police officer certification from the New Mexico Law Enforcement Academy in July 2001.

He would work for Gallup Police Department as a certified officer until 2004.

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“I was generally on patrol, and specialized in traffic divisions, which handles crashes and citations,” Maiorano said.

In 2004, Maiorano was hired by the McKinley County Sheriff’s Office where he worked on patrol and highway interdiction, looking for the trafficking of drugs and human cargo.

About 2007, the sheriff’s office began the FTE grant, a DWI-related grant for McKinley County to handle DWI-related problems, Maiorano said. He worked under Tom Mumford for about five years there. Maiorano would later return to patrolling, and serve as a deputy for six years before being promoted to sergeant and serving in that role from 2011 to 2013.

“I was hired by Felix Begay, I worked for Felix Gonzales during his term, and then Begay for his term,” Maiorano said, describing the previous sheriffs he served under. “Felix [Begay] lost the election in 2014, and I was his undersheriff at the time. As part of the arrangement I had, I went back to my lieutenant position.”

After spending several years in the lieutenant and captain positions, Maiorano said current McKinley County Sheriff Ronald Silversmith asked him to serve as his undersheriff and finish the remainder of his term.

“I’ve been with the sheriff’s office for 16 years in February,” Maiorano said. “I’ve made it through deputy, sergeant, lieutenant, captain, and undersheriff twice.”

HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED

Maiorano said the department moved to the current sheriff’s office at 300A Nizhoni Blvd. in 2010, from the previous building on Aztec Avenue that has since been demolished and is the site of a current government building.

In 2012, the sheriff’s office began to implement mobile laptop computers in their police cars as

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part of the DWI program. Maiorano said those computers allowed them to write electronic citations, criminal complaints, and police reports electronically.

The switch from handwritten reports to computer-generated reports and computer-related dispatch has all happened in the last 10 years, Maiorano said.

“Our radar technology has increased,” Maiorano continued. “The equipment we run now is dual antenna, which means an officer can monitor traffic around them while moving, whereas in the old days you had to wait by the side of the road to measure the speed of vehicles coming by.”

The bigger move being made now by Metro Dispatch, Maiorano said, is they are making the switch to a new GPS system that allows for dispatching officers based on GPS.

“It will basically dispatch the officer that’s closest to the call for service,” Maiorano said.

The ability to track statistics is always increasing, he added.

As for other changes in their equipment over the years, Maiorano pointed out that they have switched to LED lights on police units, which can be up to 10 to 20 times brighter, digital cameras on dashboards to record high definition video, and new equipment being brought in annually to better protect the officers.

MOTIVATION TO KEEP GOING

Police work is a difficult job, Maiorano said. A lot of the people who graduated with him from the academy in 2001 have retired, and only a handful are still in law enforcement.

“The job is stressful on your family, your nerves, and your emotions,” he said. “It’s taken a big

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toll on a lot of people, and it's a tough thing to do.”

Despite the difficulties of the job, Maiorano said he loves it, and loves serving his community and working with the staff he has had for years.

“The sheriff offered me an opportunity to help run the administration,” Maiorano said. He accepted the offer.

Maiorano said he began to truly understand why he enlisted in the police force after spending several years in the field.

“It was to help people,” he said. “I didn’t think I understood that when I was 18.”

When asked if there was a particular moment that reinforces that idea, Maiorano said he has had numerous opportunities to educate the community about incidents such as an active shooter in the area.

“We’ve been to churches, government offices, care facilities, Gallup schools, and to see how these people give back to their community is amazing,” Maiorano said. “It makes us think, ‘Maybe what we do is worth it.’”

Maiorano said while a lot of police work tends to be a thankless job, the moments when the public responds to their efforts, from something large like directing traffic after a vehicle pileup to more personal matters like returning a lost child to their family, are the absolute best.

“I think, ‘What I’m doing does mean something,’” he said. “You don’t realize how many lives you touch through [police work].”

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LAST TIDBITS

Maiorano said he attributes his success to his faith in Jesus Christ, and the support and efforts of his wife and children, and the staff at McKinley County Sheriff's Office.

When asked if he had any advice to give to people interested in following the path he did, Maiorano said, "If you want to get into law enforcement, don't let anything stand in your way. It's tough, but it's worth it."

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Sun Correspondent