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De Vries, Robert Oral History Interview: History of Law Enforcement in Holland

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Oral History Project 2002
Joint Archives of Holland
Holland Police

Interviewee:
Captain Robert DeVries
(Edited)

Conducted by:
Matthew Nickel
16 May 2002

ABSTRACT: (Topics Appear in similar order of Transcript)
Roles and responsibilities as Captain of Services Division, HPD Hiring, HPD’s Diversity, Evolution of HPD, Team Policing, Other changes, Community Relations, HPD Families, Character in Officers, Community between officers, Community Relations, Historical Figures of HPD, Holland’s Growth, Cultural Understanding, Gangs and Effect, Police Education Programs.
MN: Could you explain what your position is, you are the head of the services division right?

RD: Yes, the administrative services, which we oversee all of the office operations, records management, the jail, the facilities itself, and additional duties include oversight of all applicants, for employment, all grant writing, and all media relations. So kind of varied you could say.

MN: I guess, you oversee hiring, what you look for in officers, what is the... is there a particular portrait of what you could give for what kind of officer the Holland Police Department looks for?

RD: What we prefer to see is a four year degree that people would have in regards to either Public Administration or Criminal Justice, and also attendance in the police academy which there are several academies that are sponsored throughout the state, Grand Valley, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids Community College and so on. So they offer academies. Right now, to kind of give you an overview of the department, we have 63 sworn officers, the vast majority of those have bachelor’s degrees, I think we have a half dozen now that have Masters, and additional that are in graduate school right now. So, fairly well college educated.

MN: My understanding is you also have a very diverse force as well.
RD: Yes, we have been recognized several times as one of the most diverse law enforcement agencies in Michigan. So we are proud of that, we work hard at that, and we want to keep that in place as well.

MN: And with the community growing into a more diverse community, it seems necessary as well.

RD: By all means. There are a lot of agencies that would like to be in the place that we are in. It is hard getting there, and it is hard to keep that level. So you have to start your recruiting at a very early age.

MN: I guess, this is a big question, fairly broad, but is there anything that really characterizes the Holland Police Department now, as it has changed since the past, or in evolution from the force in past years till where you have come to at this point?

RD: To be honest with you, we have really come full circle. If you look back at our history, and some of the requirements, then we've kind of come back around to them. We just this past November implemented the team policing concept, where we have officers who are specifically assigned to geographical areas in the city. So, they constantly work that same area, getting to know the people, what's happening in there, and then taking the problems that are occurring in there and then trying to come up with some long term problems solving? If you look back to our history when we became an official police department in 1907, the officers were responsible for crimes that occurred while they were on duty in their area, they were held accountable for them. So in some aspects we have come full circle, in that aspect where we are getting back into the neighborhoods more,
verses just strictly in the cars patrolling and being reactive to the calls that are coming in.

MN: Could you describe the benefit of team policing?

RD: Well, we are only into it six months. Right now we feel it is going successful, and a lot of agencies across the state are watching what we are doing, but it's really, all too often what we have seen in the past, officers would respond to calls and we could have a problem after us where it could really truly be a festering problem, before it came to our attention, because you could have upwards of 6-8 different officers responding to the same address, and not aware that officers had previously been there. Now in the briefings, they go over what's occurring in those areas, so that they can hopefully get on top of it quicker, and come to render some formal solution.

MN: So method has changed?

RD: Very much so.

MN: Is there any other method, other than team policing that has changed?

RD: Probably the technology would be the big thing that is jumping out. In the last several years you have the DNA, now that we can do, we now have what is called AFIS, which is an automatic, or automated fingerprint identification system where fingerprints are now in a national databank, and we can scan and help identify where you are seeing a lot of cold cases, and unsolved cases now coming to closure with arrest because of those types of things. We also have crime mapping, that the, each one of the teams now, at their monthly meetings will get a print out of what is occurring in their areas to look for patterns, just a wide variety
of things that may be occurring in their areas, timing, they might find that they are having a bunch of car larcenies that are happening in neighborhoods on certain days and certain times, those will give the officers clues in which to set up possibly surveillance, extra patrol, whatever they may chose to do, and the officers have been pretty innovative as to things they have com up with, probably the best example was we were getting hit here on the west side, a little over a month ago with residential break-ins, in the evenings, and the officers came up with all different kinds of ideas once they had identified that the break-ins were occurring just over a week time period, and within less than a week they had the individual in custody, that is truly a tool.

MN: Creative policing it seems.

RD: Oh yeah, we have given the officers freedom to try things in their areas, anything that they think would help the situation, it is not just this is the way we've always done it in the past this is how we are going to continue to do it. It’s if there is a better way out there to resolve it, do it.

MN: Encouraging innovation.

RD: Yes, by all means.

MN: I have another question that goes back more towards the officers, it seems in reading through the history that there has been a community developed within the patrol between officers and I guess my question is what kind of community exists, what kind of bond is there between officers, it seems like with a force of 60 people of course you don’t get to know everybody, but it seems that there is some
sort of, and also with the team policing that if you are in teams you are working together, is there a community that's formed between officers in that regard?

RD: There is definitely ownership that takes place now, we saw that when we started with community policing, where the officers would take responsibility. That’s my area, I’ll take care of it. I know those kids, those are my kids, referring to kids who live in his neighborhood or her neighborhood, so we definitely want to see the ownership, so what we have done now is expand that department wide, where that whole team is now responsible for that area, to get to know the people. When you have 35,000 residents you are not going to get to know everybody, but we challenge them to get to know as many, you the key people in the areas, like block captains that are out there that are pro active. You will see the officer out of their cars more, just getting out and talking with the people. That in itself has gone quite well.

MN: What about families, policing seems to be a difficult profession that would also be taxing on the families.

RD: It can be. You know, I am lucky, I kindof married into it, my father-in-law is a police officer, but the officers themselves, you will see some social things that go on, as groups where the wives get to know each other and get a little understanding of what is going on. We try to be very open, we allow spouses to ride with, just to get a flavor for what does occur out there, so that has been a big benefit to us as well. So we want them to be aware of what is going on, because you do work strange hours, you work midnights, you work weekends, you work holidays, you work times when most people are home celebrating some type of
holiday, you are out there riding around in the cold. In that aspect, yes it is difficult.

MN: You might have touched on this a little bit, but what, from an officers perspective, what’s the role of the officer in the community, you talked about ownership, and its growing in certain areas with officers, but what would you describe the role of the individual officer or of the teams in the community?

RD: Pretty varied, to be very honest with you. Years ago it was strictly law enforcement, and it has grown from law enforcement to prevention, then you add to that on top of it, officers a lot of times become councilors. Sometimes become surrogate parents that are just non-existent for them or really don’t care, so it is really a pretty varied role. I mean it is not just you are out here to enforce the law and that is you job and that’s only your job. They don’t know one day to the next what types of tasks they are going to be asked to deal with. You take from councilor to pastor to parent to lawyer the whole ball of wax.

MN: Back to the officer, is there any particular individual requirements to apply as an officer, you talked about four year degrees, but going through a criminal justice program, are there other things, more social things that are requirements...

RD: In regards to social... it is pretty wide open...

MN: Any sort of faith oriented or any sort of individual, how to put this, any sort of character that you really look for in an individual, you talk about being councilors, it seems it would take a particular type of individual...

RD: Character yes, that is one of the things we’ve become involved in and are starting to get into some of the training called Character First, where we try and find some
of the best character traits in the people we look for. We are more, we do oral interviews here, when we are testing for officers, we have an oral board where we talk to the individual. We don’t per se fire questions at them to see what kinds of laws they know or anything like that, we want to know more about them as individuals, what they are like, what makes, lets say if you were on that panel, we want to know what makes Matt Nickel tick. What do you do, and how do you interact with people, those sorts of things, then we take them outside and we put them through a scenario, basically it is a mock crime they have to investigate, and interact with the victim, and we watch very closely how they correspond with that individual, or communicate with the individual. Those are things we look for in an individual. We don’t look for, do they attend church, twice a Sunday, are they members of this type of civic group, those sort of things, we look for honest individuals, individuals, we inform them that where stats are important in the type of work we do, we are more interested in relationship building, than knowing if they have gone out on their shift and written ten or twelve tickets. So those are they types of things we are trying to look at. I don’t know if that answers your question.

MN: It goes more from being statistical, to being more individual.

RD: Yes. I would rather see an individual go out there and make ten contacts, positive contacts, or networking with individuals in the neighborhoods, than to know that they made ten traffic stops and wrote somebody ten tickets. That is still an important part of the job, when violations do occur, and when we have problems, where we set up selective enforcement. That is still part of the job, but it is not
the only part. So we try to find individuals who are really well rounded, I guess is the best way to describe it.

MN: Really work well with the lifestyle, seeing as it's a challenge. How does it affect the lifestyle, how does the life of the officer, the roles, the varied times of work, how does that affect the lifestyle of the officer and his family, and perhaps his relationship with his co-workers and his family?

RD: Officers get very tight. Basically, it is a little bit different. Everybody has relationships with co-workers, but here, sometimes I think that the bonding is a little bit stronger at times, because this are individuals that you're backing up or going to calls on where your life may depend solely upon how they respond to these types of situations too, so you do see those bonds probably a little thicker or heavier than you do in most work relationships. But at the same time, the one thing that, I cringe when I hear the thin blue line or something like that, or you can't penetrate in there, they are going to protect themselves, and this sort of stuff, I would say to the contrary, that if there is an officer out there who is overly aggressive, or using excessive force or something like that, we are going to have officers who are the first to say, that is out of line, you don't do that, we don't do that here. Same thing with racism. We have a very strong self-policing concept here. But we are of the size where you can control that. You get an agency like some of your, well, use New York as an example, over 40,000 officers, you stop and think about it, that's the city of Holland. That's every single resident, plus would be a police officer. Are you going to have some out of that many officers that perhaps are not the best, yeah, its going to happen.
MN: So there’s checks and balances, within the department itself.

RD: Yes.

MN: The trust element seems very important on the job.

RD: It is. It is. Honesty is a key component, that we push for, the officers working with each other, that you develop that level of trust that you know that officer is going to be there, you know how you are going to respond to these types of calls, and we operate on strict policies and procedures as to how those things should be handled.

MN: With the whole community policing being put into effect, how does the department, how does the force, try to establish good relationships with the community, you say getting out of the car, you say, you talked about officers being councilors, what does the individual officers, or teams of officers do to build better relationships with businesses, residents?

RD: That is an ongoing process I think. With the residents, you have got to be there, you have got to develop a sense of being comfortable with each other, that you can talk, and so on, and that is why the more presence, the more familiarity, the more often that occurs. With the businesses, the same thing, we come in and we say you know, maybe adding some lights at night, different things they can do to help them protect their business, their property interests are things that we are going to be out there doing. Same thing with the problems that we see, like with a domestic dispute, we are going to refer them to agencies who we know are going to be able to offer some services to them. So that is how we work.
MR: I have been looking through some of the officer biographies on your website, it seems that a lot of officers carry extra roles outside the force, is that encouraged or required that officers be board members or trustees of organizations?

RD: Not required, encouraged, yes. Again that comes down to the well-rounded officers, and I think it comes down to showing the type of character that the officers are. They get involved in the community in which they are out there working daily. I think it shows their ownership that this is a town we are proud of, a lot of people at Tulip Time will come up to us and say, man I bet you guys just hate this time of year. And to the contrary, the officers love it, the vast majority really do enjoy it, it’s a change of pace for them, it’s a chance to interact with people from all across the country and it’s really a chance for us to show off the agency as well as the whole community to say, we have a great place to live. So it is the contrary to what a lot of people really think.

MN: Do you know any historical figures of the department, any individual names that really influenced the growth of the department over the years?

RD: Oh, well, I can give you the historical that I have gathered, that type of information. I have been able to track back by doing digging here and there through archives and so on myself, for the very first city marshal, up to the officers. Unfortunately I had a little crash in my computer, and I lost a lot of the dates and I am now trying to recover and plug back in dates of hire, dates of retirement and so on. So, I am working on that in my free time, which is not always very often, but we, from the 1880s till 1907 was when we became a full time law enforcement agency when the city of Holland became a city charter.
And you know our first chief was Fred Kamferbeek. Probably one of the big ones would be Chuck Lindstrom as chief in regards to, he brought in a lot of the grants here and a lot of the growth in the department in the ‘70s. I think he was a main contributor, and he’d be an excellent one for you to talk with.

MN: It seems that Holland has grown a lot over the years too, and how has that affected policing?

RD: Well... I am trying to think of the best way to put it, obviously we have increased in size because of the number of people we are responsible for as well as geographically the city has grown as well. Those are challenges; we are not only responsible for 35,000 residents, but thousands of residents, that commute here daily, for work or for pleasure or whatever, so we are responsible for that. We are kindof in the center area of being larger, like Muskegon and Grand Rapids, where a lot of narcotics that come through this area, so realistically, we encounter the same thing that a large metropolitan area does, right here. We have basically become a big, little city.

MN: With the growing population, the growing diverse population has also brought in changes.

RD: Yes, and that is why we try to keep a diverse work force here as well, and the officers go through a wide variety of training, for cultural sensitivity, and so on. Getting involved in the different civic community groups out there, so they have an understanding of the individuals that they are dealing with, and the different cultures that they are dealing with.

MN: What needs are present within the cultures?
RD: Where are we lacking yet?

MN: What is required of the individual officer culturally in the community?

RD: I think just an understanding of how the cultures themselves are different, what may be totally acceptable and regular for some types of cultures may be totally different from what we are accustomed to. We may question why those types of things happen, and so they need to have a kind of understanding there, but I think probably, the biggest difficulty thing you have with the various cultures is the ability to communicate with each other. The true challenge has been, a growth, we have one of the larger Asian populations in the state that was here, number one communication, but also there’s, in that culture there’s a large distrust with law enforcement, government related, based upon a lot of the actions that these individuals encountered in their past. That is a big obstacle to overcome. And it still remains an obstacle that we’ve properly probably overcome.

MN: How do you approach such an obstacle?

RD: We are working with a lot of different individuals that have kindof come forward in those cultures as some civic leaders, talking with them to help the recruitment of individuals that may be interested in moving into a law enforcement aspect. At the same time we are encouraging them to get involved in different city commissions, different committees and boards. So that they can truly speak for their various cultures in the present. So those types of things.

MN: So leadership within those communities.

RD: Yes, get involved. Don’t sit back and be sheltered and critical, get involved.
MN: I also have a question about the gangs. That is always a question to be asked, and sometimes it seems like it is played too heavily, sometimes it seems like it is downplayed, what is Holland’s position with gangs and how does the police force work with them?

RD: That is a can of worms in itself. Basically I think where a lot of the media attention came from is we were one of the first communities here to say ‘yes, we have a gang problem’ back in the nineties. The reason I think so much media attention came to us, was we said this before Muskegon did, before Grand Rapids did, before Kalamazoo did, and everybody thought, how can this be, how can there be gangs in Holland? This is a community where there is a church on every corner, how can they be dealing with gangs, what’s going on, Holland is going to heck in a handbasket. We actually ended up going into a couple of those larger communities afterwards when we were dealing with them and saying ‘how do we now admit that we’ve got some gang issues here? Because they watched us get beat up in media by it, but by the same token, we knew what we had, we knew they had it, but they were not necessarily coming forward and saying that we’ve got gang issues here. Yes, the gangs are still here, they peaked, they dropped, they peaked, they dropped, there’s some issues that are going on now with a few of the younger ones. Predominately what we see is kindof the middle school into the senior high age groups, we’ve got them a little bit concerned because of the indictments that took place from the ’99 firebombing, that has been the most violent that we have seen in several years. It kindof goes back and forth, and we do the best we can to stay on top of them.
MN: Is there education that goes on?

RD: Yes, officers have education. They go through gang awareness, identification, there are some here that are very well versed, and have spoken at different gang seminars, not just here, but throughout the Midwest. We offer the GREAT program, which is Gang Resistance Education and Training. We offer that already in the elementary schools. It is one of the more popular programs that we offer. We have the junior police academy; we have just a multitude of programs that we are throwing out there to the youth to get involved in to prevent them from getting involved in gangs.

MN: Raising awareness early as a preventive tool.

RD: Exactly.

MN: With gangs, has the gang problem forced any kind of evolution in the makeup of the force, as far as the type of hirings?

RD: I don’t think so much in the way of hirings. We have implemented a new unit in the nineties that is still in effect, and that’s our street team. That’s our two member, plain-clothes team that’s out there, and they are looking strictly for gang activity and street level narcotics activity. They are a primary enforcement unit for those, and they go out and anything that is gang related, we pursue maximum sentencing through the courts, the courts have been in agreement with us. Everybody kindof came together there… and lets say if you’re an individual and perhaps you have been through some type of an altercation and you are arrested for assault and battery, odds are if you are a first time offender, or something like that, you are going to end up with a fine and probation. An individual who is a
known gang member may commit that same 90-day misdemeanor and will potentially get 90 days in jail. We are just sending the message that the gang life is not acceptable here in Holland. If you so choose to fly those colors, and probably display the gang mentality, you are going to pay the price.

MN: What kinds of problems have gangs caused inside the community?

RD: Predominately it has been property damage, vandalism and so on, from graffiti and so on, but violence that has actually occurred, by far and large has been gang member versus gang member, it’s not per say innocent victims, somebody who is just sitting on the front porch that falls victim to these types of things. There are deeper factors that are involved with it. So they are in essence out on a level to destroy themselves... I got to get going here in just a couple of minutes...

[Schedule date for second interview]
MN: More generally, what kind of work have you done to piece together a history of the Holland Police, I know it is pretty broad, but...

RD: All the way from contacting the archives, which we found when we started getting interested in it, they had minimum information. It was actually years ago when all the little history quips you would see in the paper once in a while. I have always enjoyed history, so I started doing some digging and found out that we really, on our main floor level up here, had minimum to no history. A lot of times, most of the items, or records have just been tossed. And I started asking around, and found that really nobody had overseen any of the history, so I went to our basement into our archive area, where we archive our records, management, and digging through old boxes, I happened to come across several old books, some papers, that had been stored down there for lord knows how long. Right down to where we used to track in a book, complaints that would come in and payroll, years and years ago, as to how much people were to be paid on payday. It’s been a matter of just scratching around, talking with people, individuals, at the same time what ever we could find here.

MN: Former officers?

RD: Yes, former officers that had been with the department, and those that at time were still on the department that could give me as much information as possible. So with that, I happen to come across an old book, that started to list our staffing
by dates of hire. Then I managed to come up with a ledger down in the basement, and that also had been tucked away. So I was able to track it right now to what I believe is our very first city marshal. City marshals have served in between there, and then, one we became a police department in 1907, our staff from that point on. That’s what I’ve been working on in the last several years.

MN: Would you be able to give a portrait of the early force?

RD: I could, I guess as best that I know right at this point. What I found out that was kindof interesting is, when they came here, when the Dutch settled in this particular area, they didn’t believe there was any need for law enforcement. It was basically handled by the church, those types of things that would be problems in the community, and from there it went to what was called a Volksvergaterin, or Volksgatering I believe. I can’t tell you the exact pronunciation of it, but it was basically a gathering of all the males in the colony over the age of 18, that would hear different types of problems that had occurred, and then come down with a method to resolve it. From there it moved into actually the formation of our first city marshal, who was Teunis Keppel. I believe it was 18... 1847. Excuse me, Volksgatering were aged over 20. And 1867 was our first city marshal, not 1847. It is kindof interesting because we came across different writings that I would find, and information, was the first badge was made by a jewelry firm called Bregman and Joselyn, and was made by melting down two silver dollars into the shape of a star, and I believe the museum has one of those origional badges to the best of my knowledge. And we served, the city marshal served throughout that time period of ‘67 to 1907 when the city charter was adopted. And our first
Police Chief was Fred Kamferbeek, and ironically our old police department and this building as well, is resting on Fred Kamferbeek's home. The site of where his home actually was.

MN: So what kind of role did they play, I am sure it was a different role, but what was the role of the marshals and then the first police force.

RD: There is really... very little that I can track in regards to the marshals. Because I don't know how much of it actually was in writing at that time, and so much of that took, you know, those records we just haven't been able to locate. One thing we were able to, is the title changed 21 times in the time period, but some of the same individuals would come back, that used to be marshals and so on, and then they came back. I'll print you a copy of what we have been able to track thus far.

MN: That would be excellent.

RD: And that's getting to be, how many pages now that we are up to... 9 pages. These go from the first term, the marshals, and then what I have been able to track through that ledger right now are the officers, from our very first chief, Fred Kamferbeek, to one officer here that served five days, another officer that only served three days. And then I also get into it and like you say, ran into some time periods where the ledger was not right on track and other officers I am not sure when they retired or were still here. But in 1907, then we were able to track some of the duties of the officers. As a matter-of-fact, they set a standard; they set physical requirements at that time. Officers had to be at least 23 years of age, weight at least a 165 pounds, and be at least 5' 9". The department at that time, the very first police department consisted of the chief, and five police officers. A
police officer made a $1.92 a day. They had one bicycle that they used if they had to respond to a call. So if there happened to be two officers, one rode the bike and the other would run behind. And then their performance, job performance, I think I mentioned it to you last time, they were held accountable for what occurred. They were banned; officers were banned from speaking with each other while on duty, and not permitted to speak with anyone else, unless they were addressed first. And when walking a patrol beat they had to change from one side of the street to the other at each intersection, to ensure better coverage so that they didn’t always stay on one side, required to know everyone in their patrol area, and were held accountable for every crime that occurred on their beat while on duty.

Some of the ordinances I was able to come across that they used to have was, no racing of a horse was permitted anywhere in the city. There was a speed limit of eight miles per hour, now how they were able to try that is a good question. [Laughter] No attaching of a horse to a shade or an ornamental tree. All horses had to be secured when left unattended. One of the things that we were able to track is the, when the first City Hall was built, the City Hall as it stands now, in the, I believe it was in the northwest corner was where the first city police department jail was. There actually was a holding facility in there. And the environmental health had been in there at least before the renovations and so on. [Pause] I can make a copy of this too if you’d like.

MN: That would be excellent.

RD: So, I’ll make copies of that for you. That is just what I have been able to come up with thus far.
MN: So, you have gleaned all this from records and ledgers that were just sort of hidden with in the department?

RD: Yes. Just files, just started piecing it together, and interviews, like I say, with people that I talk with. Mainly the tracking of the employees with different ledgers that I was able to find, as a matter-of-fact, here's some of the, to give you an idea, how much searching you would have to do. [Shows ledger] These are getting fairly old. These are some of the things that they would handle. Nineteen thirty-four suicide, unknown body found in lake. Drownings that occurred in 1934. I don't know, that's just how they kept track of the records, from those, and then you would have, and this is where I was able to start to piece things together with officer's staff, here's Norris Williams, 15 years old, Railroad 6, killed in auto collision, 32nd and Michigan, that was in 1940. Talks about who the patrolmen were at that particular time. [Searching through ledger] List of their vacation days, when they were on vacation, Just finding several of these books down in the basement is how I was able to start working on some of the, right down to scores for pistol... years of service, start dates, see these were things that I used quite heavily. [Looking through ledger]

MN: One thing you might be interested in, I am not sure if you have looked through the City Clerk's files in the Archives, and, because they have the Police and Fire Board records. I am not sure if those would ever help you any.

RD: Okay, yes... See these, [points to ledger] this is how I started putting these together. Here's June 1, appointed 1907, when the department first started.

MN: So are these pretty much the files that you have found.
RD: Yes, digging in boxes in the basement. Pete Steketee, this is the property that he was issued. And it was fun; I had good time I had going through it. John Wagner, number four, this is what he was issued: pair of handcuffs, jail key, alarm key, three cell keys, booth key, there was his serial number. [Pause] Fred Kieft. Violation of bicycle ordinance, they would write down the people, who they had, fine had cost $3.00.

MN: Definitely quite a change from...

RD: today...

MN: computers

[Laughter]

RD: Exactly, but that is what I would just start digging through and try to put it together as best is could, and figure it out, and just when you would think that you are doing really good on some, along would come other dates that would not match up and then I’d have to change it to a question mark, right down to what I found is this shovel right along side of you there which was the shovel that was used to break ground for this building. I got that out, because hey, that would be kindof neat, we could get another shovel when we break ground here this fall, we’d have the two of them. So we’d have both of them to display, I am hoping we’ll have an area where we can display some of this stuff. And I actually started digging, and it was really ironic, the guys knew I was interested and was trying to do as much as, and I actually wrote in the city newsletter, I put a couple of articles in there on some of our history, and more people would respond, and I got called up, one day I was working, and I got called to the front desk, and one of our
officers, Pete Bontekoe from years ago, his family happened to come in and say, *is there anybody here that is interested in history in the department*, and they said well yeah, and they mentioned myself. He had passed away, but they brought in his old nightstick and bobby helmet. Officers used to, years and years ago, wear a bobby helmet type, and they brought that in. And gave it to us, and we now have it on display in our display case. Weird little things, all of a sudden, someone would say, well DeVries is interested in that, and they would point them in my direction. We'd sit down and talk and chat as much as we could, and that is where it has come from.

**MN:** Wow that's really interesting! So you probably, are you able to understand, at all, understand the changes the force has gone through over the years, of the materials?

**RD:** Yes, right down from where the officers would respond on bike, in 1907, to when we got our first cars, and this sort of stuff. They would have to go up to River Ave. and look to see if a light was on. They would turn a light on if there was a call and then they'd have to check in with the station to find out what they had to respond to, because they had no radios in their cars. There's some disagreement as to when exactly we got the radios, but it was generally around the time of World War II. That's when the officers first started getting the radios. Well, then it went from the car radio to the portable radio to now the officers are actually being dispatched by computer. They can actually go out on a shift and never really have any voice communication with central dispatch. They technically can be dispatched totally by computer. And converse back and forth with computer.
So it's amazing to see us go from having to respond on a bicycle, to what they have available to them there. To fingerprinting, to where we have come with fingerprinting, with the automatic, the fingerprint identification system, that looks, not just statewide, but nationwide. It has just been a multitude of changes that we have seen. It is really interesting to see it from the old revolvers to what they used to carry to us going to larger caliber revolvers, to our first semi-automatics, to an upgrade of the automatics a few years ago to a forty caliber. Then you have the bulletproof vest, that's a whole... those things have occurred throughout the seventies.

MN: It is interesting because I have been reading some of the Clerks files, and how discrepancies here and there like you have described. One of the interesting ones I have found involves Jack Van Hoff and Chief Antles, I don't know if you have run into this as well.

RD: [Laughs] Yes, as a matter of fact it's in here [opens file], Van Hoff, I don't remember anything on that one per se... where is it here?

MN: When Jack Van Hoff replaced Chief Antles, there were, I guess it happened over the discretion, the police board went over, over ruled the City Council in some way. With the materials I have had to work with there is a very large question marks. And that's all...

RD: This is what I have been able to come up with, 1939 Chief Van Rye retired, and replaced by Ira Antles. He only lasted until April of 1940, and I think it was a news article, or how I came up with it, but there's a variety of different charges against him and claims, but on of which is his reference to police work as being
“90% BS and 10% backbone,” was one of the comments that drew a lot of problems with him, and then he did get replaced by Jake Van Hoff, who served until 1966 or somewhere around there, so that was one of them. I did come up with that, but I would like to look at the City Minutes, the council minutes, what that kind of stuff has to say about it, it would be interesting to see.

MN: You would be interested there are a lot of things in quotation marks that assume that the reader knows the situation and, you might know, probably would know better than I would. But I have been curious reading those files. Some of the discrepancies of that nature sounded like they would overlap with what you have done so far. I guess along those lines, that you know of in the history of the force, has the Holland Police ever been criticized by either the community or surrounding communities.

RD: Never. [Laughs] I am kidding you. Oh, yes, by all means. There has been different things that have happened, but I guess it would, we have complaints against officers that are investigated, have officers ever been discharged, yes, they have, so I mean that, it goes in streaks. To give you specifics on it, some I could, some I wouldn’t be able to because of personnel type issues. By far, our department has a very good reputation across the state, and across the nation, with what we do. Just the nature of the business we are involved in, there are criticisms that do come up.

MN: What kinds of actions bring the most kinds of criticisms, and not necessarily warranted or unwarranted criticisms but what kinds of complaints are usually filed?
RD: Racial type incidents. Where individuals claim that perhaps some enforcement or contact with them was based solely on race. That's where you see it a lot, and it is not just us, this is a national that is going on right now with racial profiling, which everyone has heard considerably. Excessive force claims would be additional ones. That's probably two of the more common, would be the amount of force that was potentially used and I mean, you can go from the days of the 1960s, where it was back then, kick butts and take names, and that was the way police work was. It was not uncommon for the officers to get into the all out fisticuffs, and it was no big deal. Or to just blatantly sit there an bump somebody in the head with a billy club. Or saps that they used back then, which were leather, filled a lot of times with steel. To the point where you have seen progression. If you think back to the sixties with the democrat riots and so on that took place. Not democrat riots, from the democrat convention when they had the fights, and the charges of police brutality. To the point now where officers use any form or method of physical force, it's documented. And there has to be, we work on what is called a continuum of force where we start with certain methods which are like verbal commands and so on, to physical and right on up to the point where you would use deadly force, and there has to be justification for each level of escalation as to why you then moved to this level, and then what you did at that particular level. And with every single report, if force is used, it is completed and is attached to that report, so that we have documentation as to what did occur. A lot of changes over the years have taken place. We will get people who will call or criticize a lot of times, because they simply don't understand how
the department function. We may show up and maybe there has been a fight. Let's say it is between you and I, the officers show up. Let's say I assaulted you, you are waiting for us to come and arrest me. We can't do it, because it was a misdemeanor offence that was not committed in our presence. So then we have seek a warrant. So, a lot of times people felt that the police officers, they thought, why aren't they doing anything about it? A lot of it is educating the people as to what we can and cannot do as well. Those types of things where you get people who will call or criticize, you know, take for example, probably one of the latest things that occurred here where people would question it would be the high speed chase that took place two weeks ago with a stolen truck, those types of things. By nature of the business that we are in, it is dangerous and things do happen, and they happen in a moment's notice.

MN: I don't know if your research has shown at all how the force is changed through the growth of the city of Holland, but are you able at all to speak on that kind of subject?

RD: Yes, somewhat. The department was five or six strong, and then moved into, I cannot give an exact counting, I could if I went back and started to break it all down. I have not really done that to see how we have grown, there was some significant growth after World War II, there was some significant growth in the sixties, and probably the largest growth was in the seventies. And then the department did not really get or have any expansion until, the 80s. And that was when we, late 80s, early 90s when we wrote for the grants and started to expand through community policing. To give an example, I started in 1977 with the
department, and in 1980 I went on the road full time. There were 50 sworn at that
time in 1980, so in a 22-year time period, now we are at 63 sworn. So over 22
years we have grown over 13 positions.

MN: What specifically have gangs done to effect the police department internally, how
have you changed as a result?

RD: Well, I can definitely tell you that because when I was promoted in 1999 into
community services, so people would ask then what we were doing about gangs,
and it was really easy to tell people, nothing. Because we weren’t dealing with
gangs. It was not until about ’91 when we started to experience some of the gang
activity. And since that time period that is when we saw some of the expansion,
we moved into community policing, where we had to officers directly in the
neighborhoods. So community policing was a result of some of the gang related
issues. We have created a lot of technology, gang databases, that we can work
with and share with, we have officers who have become trained in and become
very well versed in identifying gang graffiti. People can see it up there, what does
it mean, what does it say? Ninety nine percent of the individuals are not going to
be able to tell you. We have created the street team, which is a two-person plain-
clothes team that concentrates on street level and gang, alcohol, and drug
reinforcement. So they are working those types of crimes. Our detectives have
become more verse in regards to the gang activity, up until, and to include in the
last couple of years, working with the US Attorney’s Office on indictments. In
’99 when we ad all the firebombings here, the gangs adopted what they called
their code of silence, and there’s ways to break those as well, and that is through
Federal Grand juries where they are forced to testify, and we chose to move into the federal system. We were going to do whatever we had to do, to make it work. In a 12 year time period, the department has really come long way. We had to learn and grow with it as it occurring in the community too, because we weren’t prepared for it.

MN: One interesting detail that I have run into is there is a Holland Sentinel article in 1926 woman being hired onto the police force, which to my boss and I, we wonder about this, because it seems so bizarre in Holland that still does not have suffrage, has also hired a police woman. But we don’t know the credibility of this yet but still looking into it but, how is gender, the woman officer changed and how has that changed the department having women join the force?

RD: Big time. If it was in '26, I would dare say it would be clerical, clerical type staff. I have documented our sworn officers, let me grab that because I printed that out for you.

[Leaves for printer, then returns]

RD: Lets see, I think Betsy Wackernagel was our first female, I might be wrong, Cindy may have been it. Yes, Cindy Fricke was our first female. It is possible in '26 with somebody like that that did solely parking type enforcement, but '72 is the first female officer that I can track, and that was Cindy Fricke, who I had the opportunity to work with. Great lady. And then Betsy Wackernagel was the second female that was hired; she is now a professor out in, I think it’s the University of Montana. But we now have, I believe it is eight female officers. When I started we had one female officer, no female cadets, and I think we had
four or five female civilian staff. They worked out of the female locker room here. At that time was, the place was built in '72 when we just hired out our first female. It was sufficient, to what it is today it’s pathetic. To be very honest with you, and that was one of our big pushes too towards the whole new facility, building is so we have eight female officers working out of a building that was basically designed for none. It was more or less at that time just a matron’s lounge is what it was called. And that is where they can go and sit and have coffee. Or something to that effect. To say how we actually police, hasn’t changed in that regard. The female officers are very well accepted, and do a great job. They were very upset, many of them, over what occurred over in Kentwood, and then a female officer there, female officer there being severally beaten, and then the questions that are raised is well, should, if there is a female is on the road, be a male with her and this sort of stuff. It was basically taking it, the whole women moving into law enforcement moving back into the sixties. Our officers are very capable of handling situations on the roads. To say that it has caused problems on the roads, it has not at all. Very well accepted. In fact, our officer of the year this year was a female officer. So she does a great job. Well respected in the community and well respected in the department.

MN: And who is she?

RD: Lisa Bancuk. So she was actually assigned to Hope College and that area as well with their team coordinator. She does a great job.

MN: I guess beyond law enforcement, law enforcement in the community and communication, we talked about last time, which seems good. Outside of law
enforcement, what is the role of the officer in Holland, in the Holland community? What kinds of roles do the officers take, outside of law enforcement, in the community, or is that very much the individuals discretion?

RD: The individual's discretion. Totally up to that individual. I guess most are very active in the community in regards to civic type groups. School activities, family comes utmost at the top of the list. Wide variety of different face, there is no specifications what is expected of them in the community when they are off duty.

MN: As an officer, could you describe how the job affects the lifestyle of the family, of the officer?

RD: What’s it like?

MN: Yes, what is it like on the family? How does it affect the lifestyle of the family of the officer? It’s tough, you have a multitude of different things, because the officers work a wide variety of shifts, and most individuals are in say a different work days, evenings or midnights. And that is their shift. The officers rotate, they don’t stay on days, they don’t stay on evenings, they don’t stay on midnights, they rotate every several months so that whole rotation thing makes it extremely difficult. You don’t know from, well you can know all year in advance what you’re schedule is going to be but when, you have got to plan you vacations around those types of things. Same thing if you work weekends. They work holidays. It can be tough when you are riding around on Christmas eve night, and everybody is at someone else’s home it seems, enjoying family time and the holidays, and you are out riding around in the cruiser in the snow and the cold, it can be depressing. So those types of things. An we are real open with the
holidays and make sure that the officers do get time to see family. So it does, that
in itself plays a role, but then you add to it the types of things that are involved in.
The unknown as to what they are involved in. They can go from having
absolutely nothing to do, probably a way to describe the job like I have heard said
before, hours of boredom with moments of sheer terror. They have got to be able
to respond, probably the best way to describe some of it is what has been said
about 9/11, what occurred in New York, where thousands and thousands of
people fleeing out of that area, you’ve got several hundred police and firefighters
running into. They are trained and respond without even thinking about it.
There’s a problem, it is their job to go in and take care of it. It is different on the
families and so on, and you’ll see generations of police officers, we’ve got
officers here that have sons that are now involved in law enforcement, maybe
even daughters, I am not sure. I don’t believe we do, that have gone into law
enforcement. That’s unique. But it does weigh on it, and that is why we make
sure family time here is very important.

MN: Have you seen the family lifestyles of officers change over the years, or some of
the challenges and the rewards still the same?

RD: I would say about the same.

MN: What do you think the, how do you think the role of the officer has changed over
the years, after reading about these guys from way back when, to now where you
talk about using all the technology and gang databases?

RD: Well, technology is obviously great, but in essence we’ve kindof come back
around too, where here the officers, like I said, were held accountable you know
in 1907 for what is occurring in their area, we’ve now got officers assigned to permeate areas, so they are responsible for their particular area, for what crime does occur in there and what problems are occurring that they have got to be able to resolve or solve them. In some essences, we’ve come back around but we’ve got just better technology now as a tool to assist us, but we’ve always said here and I firmly believe in it, that the officers are, you can have the absolute best technology, but without talking with people and being able to communicate with people you are not going to solve problems. Technology is not going to do it alone. You need the people skills too.

MN: I have heard the Holland Police, the way you police, your style is being described as creative, now how do you think...

RD: We’d like to think so...

[Laughs]

MN: Law enforcement artists, how do you think you guys work to be creative in your law enforcement and your problem solving?

RD: Well, the one thing we have always had here is good leadership where our chiefs have been open to looking at different things, we get involved in different associations, different organizations. The chief attends the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police Conference, and the International Association, and we always used to laugh too when Lindstrom would go and there would be groans when he would come back because he would come back with just these gobs of ideas that he would want to have us look into and possibly implement. While you are groaning in one aspect, you are proud in the other, that they are out there looking,
and Lindstrom right up until the last months of his retirement, where you would
think you are winding down your last year and you think just let me finish my last
year and let me get my time in and go, was still looking at ways to constantly
improve things. So getting involved in those things and looking and then taking
what other departments are doing and them molding it to how it can best work in
our community is probably what we are tried to do and we've developed quite a
reputation around the state as an agency to watch as to what we are doing. And
then others would jump on and implement in that area. So we're proud of the at
for an agency ourselves.

MN: Do you think that will change with the construction of the building?
RD: Hopefully we will just get better yet. I see the department just continuing, we've
got the drive to not be status quo, we've got the drive to do the best that we can do
in the community. I can tell you right now, what we are doing today five years
from now; we probably will not be doing all of it. Because in five years the
community is going to look different and doing different things, so we have to
respond. Things have changed since September 11\textsuperscript{th} in regards to how you
respond to things and look at things, so if you say that what we are doing now or
would dare say is going to last us 10 years, no way. A department would cease to
exist. Or need some definite turnover.