



Boynton Beach Police Department Office of Media Relations

G. Matthew Immler, Chief of Police

In 1920, the area of Boynton was a farming and dairy community that wanted to become a town

because the people living here wanted electricity. On April 14, 1920, 49 men voted to incorporate the town and call it Boynton Beach. On June 12, the town established the Boynton Beach Police Department. Fred Benson became the first town marshal.

Benson was the only law enforcement officer in the three-square-mile town. The city built the town jail on Ocean Avenue (it cost \$84 to build) and it was a wooden room with two adjoining cells — one for white prisoners, the other for black prisoners.

The following year, Benson was removed as town marshal and replaced by Terry Ward, who patrolled the town on bicycle.

Two years later, when Earl Gleason took over as town marshal, he hired two assistants — O.F. Knuth and V.R. Rossen. The hurricane of 1928 destroyed the jail and City Hall. The jail was rebuilt to have four cells.

By 1932, the residents of Boynton Beach were calling their police leaders chief, instead of town marshal.

The first “police chief” was Mott Partin, who took helm of the department in 1932 and was also superintendent of the water department. He received a monthly salary of \$125.

Partin had the police department’s first car, a Model A Ford. In a 1958 article in the *Palm Beach Post-Times*, he said that the back end of the car was usually filled with shovels and tools so that in his rounds of the town, he could stop to repair water mains where needed.

He held both jobs for about five years. When he resigned his duties with the water department, his salary dropped to \$100 a month. He was chief for 10.5 years, resigning in 1942.

There wasn’t much growth in the department until 1947, when A.C. “Boots” Carver became chief and hired two other men to police the town with him. They worked 12-hours shifts through 1949, when a fourth man and a second car was added to the force.

During Carver’s tenure as chief, a two-way radio system was installed in the two police cars and the force grew to seven officers — including James Butler, the town’s first black police officer, who was paid \$60 a week.

In 1953, a new identification bureau was added to the west side of the police station. Carver told the *Post-Times* in 1958 that “fortunately Boynton is almost free of any crime element,” and that most of the cases involved traffic or petty misdemeanor crimes.

The department got its new headquarters in 1961 when it relocated to the Recreation Center, formerly City Hall, on North Federal Highway.

Records show that in 1960, the rate of pay was \$8 a day or \$52.50 for a period of two weeks. The weekly income in 1965 was \$75; it went up to \$85 if you made an arrest and went to court.

In 1972, under Chief Noah Huddelston, the department moved into its current home on Northeast First Avenue. It cost \$262,000 to build.

“Rip,” a 95-pound Doberman Pinscher, became the department’s first police dog in 1975.

In 1979, Capt. Ed Hillery devised the “4-10” plan, a four-day, 10-hour-a-day work week to maximize visibility on the streets at night when statistics showed crime was at its peak.

Police departments from as far as Colombia and California came here in 1981 to see the police department’s IBM computer system — one of the first of its kind in the country. The “PIDAS” (Police Information Dynamic Access System) provided information such as the number of burglaries in a

particular neighborhood, the hours of the day with the most crimes, where the most accidents occurred.

In September 1981, the department mourned the death of K-9 Smokey, who was thought to be the first K-9 dog killed in the line of duty in Palm Beach County. Smokey, who was accidentally shot by a Florida Highway Patrol trooper while chasing a fleeing suspect, worked for the department for two-and-a-half years.

The crime rate skyrocketed in the mid 1980s, as all of South Florida declared war on crack cocaine. Boynton Beach saw a 50 to 60 percent increase in violent crime from 1985-1986, according to *The Palm Beach Post*.

In 1985, starting officers earned \$18,220.60 a year. Two years later, the police union and the city agreed to a 4 percent pay raise.

In 1989, when several of K9's were up for retirement, the department decided to eliminate the program and relied on other agencies for assistance. The department revived the K9 program in 1995, thanks to donations from the community.

The 1990s were a time of many firsts for the department – the first Citizens Police Academy in 1993 had 23 residents participating. A state grant helped start the department's first Marine Unit, which hit the seas in 1999 with Sgt. Paul Sheridan at the helm of a 26-foot catamaran. And in 1996, the department saw its first female sergeant with the promotion of Wendy Danysh Unger.

Some other highlights of the 90s:

Officers were required to take fitness tests in 1991 as part of their overall performance reviews. When the Ezell Hester Jr. Community Center opened in 1992, the department planned operations to rid the neighboring Sara Sims Park of drug dealing and illegal drinking. That same year, Officer Bill Tome created the Police Athletic League, giving local youth an alternative to hanging out on the streets after school by playing football and basketball.

The department saw a 79 percent increase in auto thefts in 1994, and handled only one homicide in 1995, down from six the year before. A federal grant for \$165,128 in 1997 helped the department purchase laptops for all the patrol cars.

Officers carrying placards and wearing white T-shirts emblazoned with "Boynton Beach Unfair to Police" on the front protested outside City Hall in October 1998. Their complaint was that they were underpaid and treated poorly by the city.

The new century took the department to the World Wide Web in 2000 when it launched its Web site, www.bbpd.org. The department became accredited by the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation in 2001.

Tragedy struck the department again in 2001 when K-9 Zeus was killed in the line of duty during a burglary at the Medication Station. Zeus had been a member of the department since late 1994.

SWAT got its first medic in 2004 when a fire rescue lieutenant joined the team.

The mid 00's saw some challenges – chaos at Club Ovation, manpower shortages, an audit of evidence and escalating violence among rival gangs.

When G. Matthew Immler was appointed police chief in September 2005, he filled those vacancies and refocused the agency's eyes on community policing by creating the department's Community Action Team.

Christmas Eve 2006 brought terror to shoppers at the Boynton Beach Mall, the site of a gang-related shooting. Three years later, the shooter was sentenced to 40 years in prison.

The end of the decade brought the department into the national spotlight – on the TV shows *COPS* and *Most Shocking/Most Daring* – and expanded its presence online with the social networking sites MySpace, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

Today, 90 years later, the Boynton Beach Police Department is a full-service law enforcement agency with a 165-member force of sworn personnel and 78 civilian members. The department has more than 100 police vehicles and provides services to more than 75,000 residents.

We've come a long way, and will continue to play an instrumental role in the growth and prosperity of Boynton Beach.

