

Retired GPD lieutenant passes at age 53

Written by By Babette Herrmann & Staff
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Friends, colleagues remember Matt Wright fondly

Matt Wright, who retired after 20 years with the Gallup Police Department, died this past weekend after a short bout with cancer. He was 53.

“It was a shock to hear of his passing,” Gallup City Manager Maryann Ustick said. “He was so young.”

Born and raised in Gallup, Wright spent most of his adult life with the Gallup Police Department, rising from the ranks of patrolman to serving, at various times in his career, as a detective and public information officer.

He headed the department’s SWAT team for a while and at the time of his retirement was a lieutenant in charge of the department’s narcotics unit.

“He was probably the best detective the Gallup police ever had,” said Rick White, who served with Wright for most of the time he worked for the department.

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In fact, Wright, White and John Allen, former deputy chief of the GPD, were good friends and retired within months of each other in 2015.

Both Allen and White commented on Wright's ability to get confessions out of suspects.

"He always treated the suspects with respect," White said.

A few years before his retirement, he had a case in which a man was accused of murder. When Wright got the suspect into the interrogation room, he was able to get the man to talk about the murder. The suspect said he was told by a witch to kill the man.

Wright immediately said he understood, and he convinced the man to tell him everything about the murder. In fact, after the interview, the man called up his mother and told her that he had convinced detectives that the witch was responsible for the murder, when really, Wright played along and elicited a complete confession, which led to the man's conviction.

Allen described his friend as a person who really enjoyed his job and had high expectations of himself and those who served in the department.

There were times, Allen said, when detectives closed out a case with an arrest and expected praise for a job well done. Wright instead told them they now had to return to work the next day.

"He would explain that they were expected to do a good job and when they did, they could come back to work the next day," Allen said.

Robert Cron, who was the GPD chief for several years before Wright retired, remembered Wright often saying that good work was not something you should expect to get a raise for doing.

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Cron said he had a lot of respect for the way Wright did his job and knew that when Wright was in charge, the job would get done.

Wright's sister Heidi Guzman Birt said as a child, her brother enjoyed being a prankster. Allen said he also saw the humorous side of Wright when he came to work with the police department.

"He got along with everyone and had a great sense of humor," Allen said.

When he graduated from Gallup High School in 1983, Wright went to California for a hike and worked in construction before he decided to make police work his career.

After he retired, Wright accepted some building projects from his friends and spent time overseeing rental properties he had accumulated while he worked for the police department.

***By Babette Herrmann
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