



Walking Away From a Way of Life: Captain Dixon Retires After Nearly 30 Years

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EDWARDSVILLE – After nearly three decades in law enforcement, Captain Mike Dixon of the Madison County Sheriff's Office is retiring from duty.

Dixon said he wanted to work in law enforcement when he was 14 years old. He said he came of age in impoverished areas of Alton and would often see his friends going down paths he found to be destructive. Because of that, Dixon said he always did his best to get them back on track. He also said he has a special sort of passion for helping people and has no patience for the victimization of vulnerable populations such as children or the elderly. In fact, Dixon served as the Deputy Commander of the Southern Illinois Child Death Investigative Task Force, a group investigating the deaths of children across 34 counties in Southern Illinois.

Dixon began his career in law enforcement after graduating from Lewis and Clark Community College with an Associate's Degree in Law Enforcement Administration. He took a job with the Bethalto Police Department in 1990 and transferred to the Madison County Sheriff's Office in 1995 under Bill Clinton's Community Policing Project.

“They had two of us go out on patrol in the rural areas – some urban areas too, especially with open selling of narcotics, but it was mostly in rural areas,” he said. “We focused a lot on quality of life issues. We would meet with township boards and supervisors and ask them what the people there needed us to do. We worked a lot with illegal dumping and roadside parties.”

While dumping and roadside parties may seem like minor hindrances today, Dixon said the 1990s were a much different time. He recounted people who owned rental properties gutting their lots, purging everything before renting it to someone new, and dumping it in unincorporated areas of the county. Dixon said he would work to trace these illegal dumping sites back to their original owners and cite them.

As for the parties, Dixon said teenagers would gather in groups of more than 100 and block the streets and even bridges in rural areas of the county. During these parties, Dixon said there would be violent fights and injuries as well as disruption of motorists during the night.

That aspect of the Madison County Sheriff's Office was terminated in the early 2000s due to budgetary cuts, but Dixon was able to advance in the ranks to become Deputy Director of the Metropolitan Enforcement Group of Southwestern Illinois (MEGSI), which worked in three counties. He followed that by transferring to general investigations as a sergeant in 2005 and made lieutenant in 2010.

After attending the FBI National Academy, Dixon became head of Madison County detectives in 2011.

When asked how he feels about leaving law enforcement, Dixon said it was a challenging and emotional decision he made after nearly three decades of his duties wearing on him. The response to police by the media and the general population is another reason he gave for his departure.

“A lot of the way law enforcement is portrayed in the media pits us against the people we have a duty to serve and protect,” he said. “The lack of support and that overall behavior is disheartening. There have been rulings against law enforcement even when we were doing the right thing, but that's not the whole reason I'm leaving. Twenty-nine years trying to get people justice takes a toll on everyone. I always told myself if I was

not giving 100 percent to the citizenry, or I wasn't doing as good of a job today as I did yesterday, I would walk away. It's all wore on me. I can't give what I used to give.”

Law enforcement, Dixon said, is a major part of his identity. As he walks out of the Madison County Sheriff's Office, he said he is going to do investigations for a St. Louis law firm, but promised he would keep his options open. He said he will look for something like an open slot for a chief of police he could maybe fill in the future.

“When you have the commitment most law enforcement has, it's more than a job, it's your entire way of life.”