

Oakland lawman prepares to hang up gun and holster

By DALE DUNCAN
Of The Oakland Press

PONTIAC — The most touching scene in the old westerns was when the sheriff gave up his badge.

In those scenes, the grand old lawman, after years of defeating the hooligans, finally decided to settle down and marry that almost-pure vixen who ran the Front Street saloon.

Those "Gunsmoke" scenes, however, aren't exactly what it's like in today's world of law enforcement.

There is little need to shed tears for Capt. Charles T. Whitlock, who, at 57, will retire his badge and holster his gun next month after nearly a third of a century in Oakland County law enforcement.

Whitlock isn't necessarily giving up law enforcement permanently and, with a wife at home, he won't have to shop around area saloons for companionship.

And, "Charlie," as he's less formally known, has enough memories to see him through the next couple of decades, plenty of opportunities still ahead of him and no regrets about the career that's ending.

He's seen Oakland County grow from less than 300,000 people in 1949 when he joined the Pontiac Police Department — "It paid \$2,700 a year and you bought your own uniform," — to the more than one million people who live here today.

He's had an opportunity to participate in just about every advancement in law enforcement the county — and the nation — has seen since then.

He's been an active participant in a dramatic shift from an era when a cop depended on street savvy and brawn, to a time when scientific

expertise and technological gadgetry have become a policeman's stanchions.

Whitlock has worked as a vice officer, beat patrolman, grand jury investigator, chief detective, and was one of the original seven officers who founded the Waterford Township Police Department in 1954.

He remembers what it was like to walk a beat and what it was like to patrol such "remote" places as Troy, Madison Heights and Southfield without benefit of two-way radios.

He's pulled no punches anywhere along the way, always calling things as he saw them.

In fact, it was one such outburst of honesty with Sheriff Johannes F. Spreen that resulted in his banishment four years ago to supervisor of "Spreen's leper colony" — the sheriff's 14-person civil division hidden away in a remote corner of the Oakland County courthouse.

Employees of the division serve the court, delivering such things as subpoenas and legal writs.

"Spreen's a bull-headed German and I'm a bull-headed Scotchman," said Whitlock of their quarrel. "But when someone treats me like a dog, I bite them. I never agreed to take his abuse or to kiss his a--."

If the sheriff isn't exactly one of Whitlock's buddies, there are several others are.

More than 100 of his closest associates and employees are giving Whitlock a retirement party Jan. 18 at White Lake Oaks on Williams Lake Road.

More than likely, there will be some heavy story swapping that night — and, after 30 years of storing them, Charlie will probably



lead the way.

He'll briefly give his rough-hewn portrayal of the no-nonsense cop only to break into a smile and erupt with a hearty belly-laugh as he remembers one of the funnier anecdotes from the earlier years.

He's got several:

• "I'll tell you one of the best, but don't mention these guys' names," he says, warming up to an oft-told yarn about a Keego Harbor murder of several years ago.

The prime suspect in the case had fled out of state and attempted suicide. Whitlock and two other local officers needed to question the suspect before death robbed them

of the opportunity.

"None of us had make the trip and auditors was close smiling slyly. "So bucks off the corps trip."

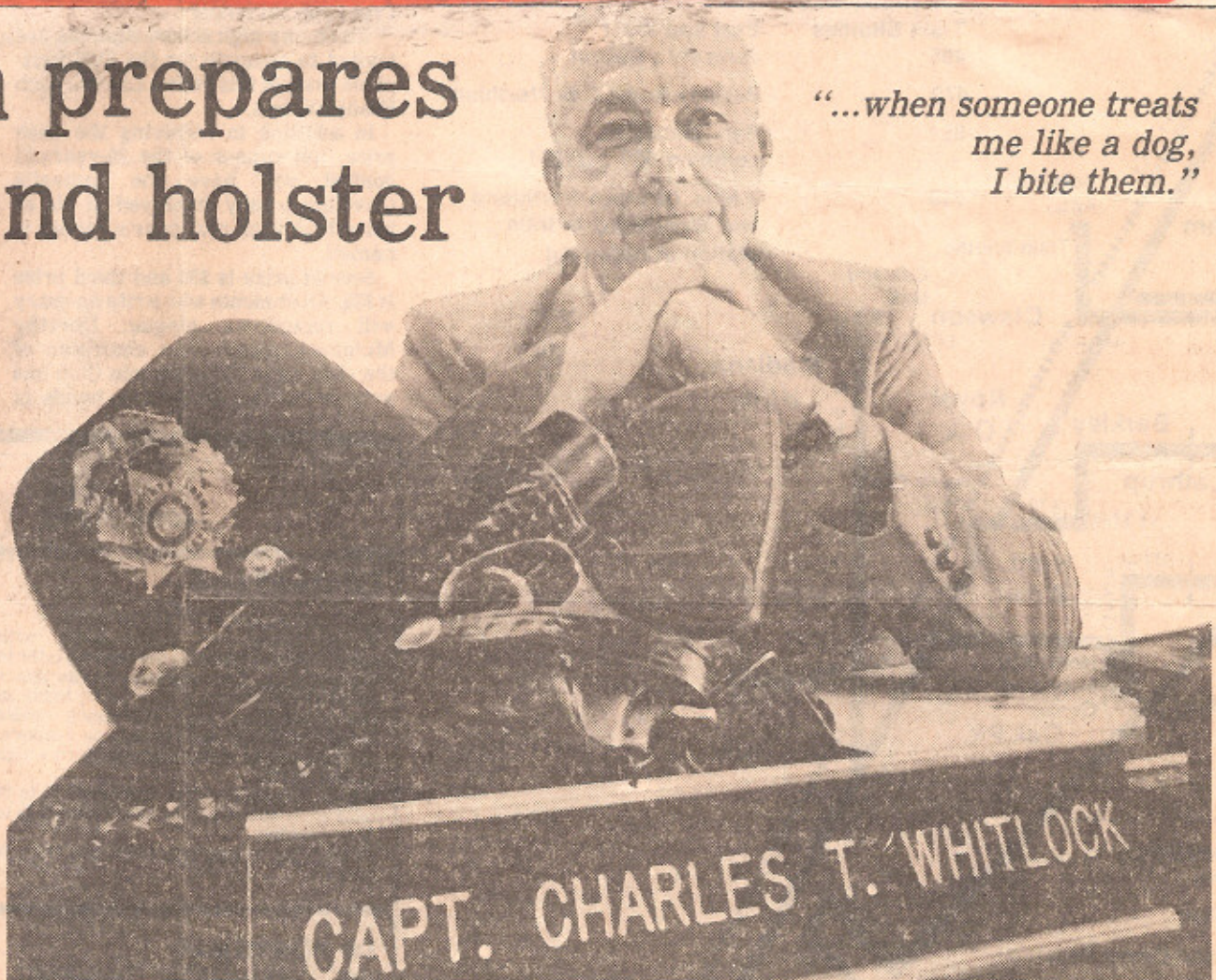
• William K. Hanger of the Pontiac Police — was known as He Hanger back when I were both patrolmen says.

"He used to come and say something 270 standing by, muscle to apply."

Whitlock grew

Wman prepares gun and holster

"...when someone treats me like a dog, I bite them."



Oakland Press photo by Edward R. Noble

and technological have become a stanchions. has worked as a vice patrolman, grand jury chief detective, and of the original seven founded the Waterford Police Department in

bers what it was like to and what it was like to "remote" places as Edison Heights and without benefit of two-

d no punches anywhere way, always calling saw them.

was one such outburst with Sheriff Johannes F. at resulted in his four years ago to of "Spren's leper the sheriff's 14-person in hidden away in a ner of the Oakland house.

s of the division serve delivering such things as and legal writs.

a bull-headed German? "I'll tell you one of the best, but don't mention these guys' names," he says, warming up to an oft-told yarn about a Keego Harbor murder of several years ago.

100 of his closest and employees are lock a retirement party White Lake Oaks on ce Road.

likely, there will be story swapping that d, after 30 years of , Charlie will probably

lead the way. He'll briefly give his rough-hewn portrayal of the no-nonsense cop only to break into a smile and erupt with a hearty belly-laugh as he remembers one of the funnier anecdotes from the earlier years.

He's got several: "I'll tell you one of the best, but don't mention these guys' names," he says, warming up to an oft-told yarn about a Keego Harbor murder of several years ago.

The prime suspect in the case had fled out of state and attempted suicide. Whitlock and two other local officers needed to question the suspect before death robbed them

of the opportunity. "None of us had any money to make the trip and the board of auditors was closed," he said, smiling slyly. "So, we stole 200 bucks off the corpse and made the trip."

• William K. Hanger — now chief of the Pontiac Police Department — was known as Henry Wadsworth Hanger back when he and Whitlock were both patrolmen, the captain says.

"He used to come on the radio and say something crazy like, 'Car 270 standing by, with wit and muscle to apply.'"

Whitlock grew up 60 miles

northeast of Cairo in Southern Illinois coal country in a town called Harrisburg. It was there, in 1927, that he got his first taste of law enforcement.

"I remember my grandfather holding me up on his shoulders to view a public hanging," he says, showing the death certificate of the man hanged just to prove it happened. "That's when I decided to be a good boy."

The life of a cop seems most suited to him. Aside from his obvious humor, he has the macho kind of bravado that television has led us to expect in an old-west sheriff.