

# The tenure of a top cop

## Commissioner Ramsey's life, love of law enforcement

By SEAN PURNELL  
Catch22

For Charles Ramsey, his job as police commissioner of Philadelphia is anything but a job.

"The day I wake up and feel like I'm going to work is the day I step down," he told UJW staffers in an almost hour-long interview.

"I enjoy the challenge. I enjoy working with people. It's something I've done my whole career. I just like policing. There's no one thing I can put my finger on. I'm just blessed to be doing something I like doing. It's not work for me. That's why I've done it for so long, why I came out retirement to continue.

"You want to do all you can to try to make a difference. No, it's not going to be perfect, not going to get A's across the board, if that's what you're looking for. But you do the best you can when it's all said and done."

Ramsey, 58, was Mayor Nutter's choice to replace Sylvester Johnson.

Ramsey was only 18 when he became a police officer in Chicago. In his rookie year, there were 10 officer slayings.

He came from an era when police didn't have bulletproof vests. It was a time that "if you get shot, then you're just shot."

No women were working in operations, he said, not until 1975, and segregation was a part of the job: White officers working together, patrolling white areas; the same with black officers.

That experience as a rookie has made him an advocate of police safety, first and foremost. A native of Chicago, he worked for the Chicago Police Department for nearly three decades, serving as everything from a police officer to commander of patrol, detectives and narcotics units. In 1994, he was named deputy superintendent of the Bureau of Staff Services, and his duties included education and training, research and development, labor affairs, crime prevention and professional counseling.

Asked to sum up his three main issues as Philly's top cop, he said there was no particular order to them. "Getting a handle on violent crime is a critical issue," he said. "Philadelphia has had more

than its share of violence for a long period of time. We can do better. So getting those numbers down is of critical importance."

As of July 7, homicides in the city have dropped 20 percent for the year when compared with the same time last year.

Developing relationships with the minority communities also is crucial, he said, as is making sure that "all members conduct ourselves as professionals at all times."

Ramsey's achievements are many: Founding the Illinois Officers' Association, commanding the 11th District back in Chicago, which led the city in crime reduction during his tenure, and serving as chief of the Metropolitan Police Department in Washington, D.C., from 1998 to 2006. There, he assisted in the investigation of the D.C. snipers, was in charge during the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, the Chandra Levy murder investigation and the anthrax attacks.

He said Chicago and Philadelphia are similar in terms of running a police force. D.C. is unique



Nicole Heath

Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey talks with the UJW group about his decades-long career in law enforcement.

because of homeland security and the presence of the federal government.

"When it comes to street crime," he said, "there's not much difference between a lot of these cities."

Ramsey called the Washington media "pretty tough to deal with" because of the local and national presence. "When they have much to do around the White House, they tend to look at the city. My experience, with one exception, was that they were pretty fair."

Ramsey's knowledge of the city and its people was impressive. He called the 12th and 25th districts the roughest in the city. Still, he said, "there are more decent law-abiding people living there than criminals."

Part of his success will come with changing the attitude toward the city. He noted that some people refer to it as Killadelphia.

"That's over the top," he said. "Who's going to come to a city called Killadelphia. It's not funny. It's not a joke. It's real." ★

# Philadelphia's gun violence: Can we get a handle on it?

By LAUREN MELENDEZ  
Catch22

In June, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Washington, D.C.'s ban on handguns. The story received national play, but the landmark decision appears to have minimal impact on deterring violent crime.

"Here in Pennsylvania, the gun laws aren't that hot anyway, so I don't know if it's going to have that much of an impact on us," said Charles Ramsey, Philadelphia's new police commissioner.

More important, he said, is building a relationship between police and urban communities to cut down on the violence.

Ramsey said he wants police officers to get more involved in communities and

help reverse the notion he thinks some Philadelphians have of cops — that they are not always here to help. Once this view is changed, he said, the lines of communication will open up and ultimately lead to better, healthier communities.

"You get out of the car, you'll solve more crime," he said. "People will be willing to talk to you. Somebody always knows something [about a homicide], but getting someone to come forward is a very, very difficult thing. Tuesday we went to two different homicide scenes. It was like pulling teeth getting anyone to say anything."

Gov. Rendell said it will take a lot more than a court ruling to slow the flood of guns into the community and the subsequent violence. He pointed out that peo-

ple who own guns legally are not the cause of most gun violence; rather it's the recipients of straw purchases and people who find guns. He gave himself a failing grade in making headway against reducing the number of guns.

Those same feelings were echoed by Mayor Nutter. He saw no correlation between the situation in D.C. and what he's facing here in Philadelphia.

Those opposed to the ban said it violates the Second Amendment of the Constitution. Nutter said his hands are full with trying to stop straw purchases and prohibit the sale of assault weapons.

In Pennsylvania, citizens are required only to have a permit when carrying a concealed weapon. They do not need a permit to purchase guns or register for them.

In 2006, "65.6 percent of homicide victims throughout the state were killed with handguns," according to the Web site Moms Against Guns.

Ramsey said buybacks help. He called it a good program, but noted that "it's debatable whether it has an impact on violent crime. There are a lot of reasons why people turn in guns. It's not a panacea. It's not going to solve all of our problems. But if somebody wants to get rid of a gun, we should make it so they can.

"We've got to find a way to lower the violence," he said. "Without question, it's totally unacceptable. We've got to find a way to reverse that trend. I think it starts with communication, it starts with establishing a dialogue. We've got a long way to go, but I think it's very doable." ★