

SLAMMER DUNK

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becoming a police officer, so when he turned 21 he joined the Lane County Reserves.

He went through the official hiring process and was placed on full-time duty. Because he already had some experience working in the jail, that is where he was placed—which he considered “a disaster” at the time.

Obviously, things don't always work out as planned, and nine months later Heidenrich found himself laid off. Still, he wasn't too worried, because he was at the top of the Eugene Police Department's hiring list.

But the phone call never came, so he asked for and received support to move to Portland, where he found a top-notch career. “In retrospect, I've been very lucky and have never regretted where life led me,” he says.

Surprisingly, being openly gay in law enforcement hasn't caused Heidenrich much difficulty. Early in his career, he recalls hearing “occasional homophobic remarks,” but he never felt they were directed at anyone in particular.

“I can count those on one hand,” he says. “And even at that, they were nothing I found to be more than annoying.”

Heidenrich notes he has felt nothing but support in recent years at the sheriff's office, both personally and professionally. He says the

department has “done an extremely good job of developing and enforcing an anti-harassment and discrimination policy” and has opened the doors not only for him but others who have been recruited from the community.

On a much, much more personal note, Heidenrich says he found out how supportive the department could be about four years ago, when his partner died.

“Staff in the sheriff's office took a collection, and I received a check for \$2,000 to aid in the expenses associated in his death,” he says. “I think this testimony speaks for itself about an organization existing in a field which traditionally is seen as homophobic.”

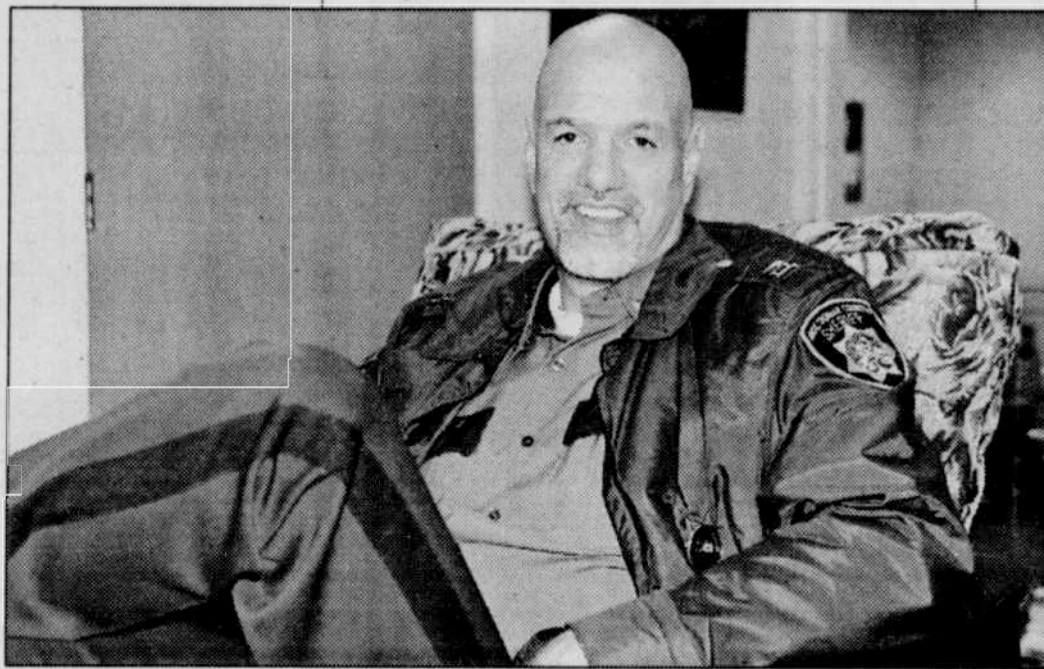
Heidenrich, who was born and raised in Eugene, received his associate's degree in criminal justice from Lane Community College and had started at University of Oregon when he received his first full-time job in law enforcement. He has been in an upwardly mobile cycle ever since.

Early on in his career with Multnomah County he worked in a jail standards accreditation unit, which he says was a key reason he was able to develop his administrative skills. He was promoted to sergeant more than 10 years ago and eventually went into the Internal Affairs

Unit. “That was a tremendous opportunity to develop [my career] further,” he says.

In the mid-1990s, Heidenrich was promoted to lieutenant. He served in that role for about four years before his latest assignment.

“Personally, I appreciated my promotion to captain and assuming the unique role of building a jail,” he says. “I enjoy the autonomy, but there's a double-edged sword. Decisions can be made, but if a mistake is made, we're stuck with it for years.”



Multnomah County Sheriff's Capt. Jay Heidenrich is working with community groups to ensure a new jail fits into the surrounding environment.

Although Heidenrich's busy life might sound like all work and no play, that is hardly the case. He found love again after the death of his partner and has been with Kevin for two years. He participates in the Sexual Minorities Roundtable and has been involved in a support role with the Portland Gay Men's Chorus for more than five years.

“Members of that group are some of our closest friends,” he says. “As a group, the members are amazingly talented. For myself, I made the commitment that I would contribute to the community in some fashion, and the chorus meets that commitment. I coordinate the merchandise for the chorus. Believe me, I don't sing.”

With his career going full speed, Heidenrich definitely enjoys just going home to relax, but he says he also likes to visit the Northwest 23rd Avenue area for coffee with friends or simply to sit down and solve a crossword puzzle.

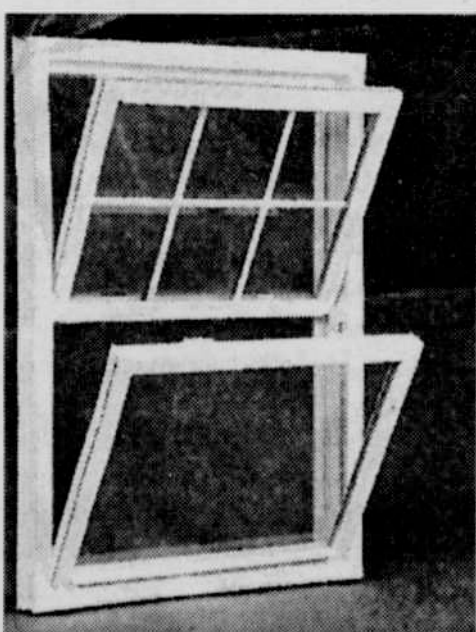
He and his partner also try to attend various social events, but he was forced to pull back recently so he wouldn't become overly committed. “Without some limitation, [Kevin] would be dragging me around to five or six things a week,” he laughs.

Seriously, though, Heidenrich says he enjoys his social life as much as he enjoys his job. And for those in the gay and lesbian community who might be interested in a law enforcement career, he says they should feel most welcome.

“I think, in the metro area at least, any gay person should feel comfortable pursuing a job in law enforcement,” he says. “Obviously, the same standards apply, and their background should fall within a comparable range.”

That's advice coming from someone who has been there and has seen the doors swing wide open. **J**

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