

# Chief deputy John King calls it a career

By [Stephanie Tshappat](#)

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Looking back on nearly 36 years in a law enforcement career he retired from on Friday, John King has learned a few things about differences between big-city and rural county police work.

“Livestock issues, we didn’t see (those) down there,” he joked.

The “down there” he referred to is Los Angeles, where King worked before being hired as the Walla Walla County Sheriff’s Office chief operations deputy in 2013.

In the Walla Walla Valley, on the other hand, “cops here have to be self-reliant, very on their toes all the time, because help and backup isn’t always close,” King said. “It’s pretty amazing how a few deputies can make the county work.”

King noted as well that because coverage is slim, it’s a rare thing for a deputy to call in sick.

“In L.A., people used their sick leave all the time,” he said. “Here, unless they’re on their death bed, people come to work. It’s very honorable, because the deputies know coverage is slim. You know when they call in sick they’re really ill or really hurting.”

In a Thursday interview with King, Sheriff John Turner, and King’s appointed successor, Deputy Gerrod Martin, King said he’s enjoyed his time working in Walla Walla.

But King, whose career includes working with four different law enforcement agencies, won’t be leaving the sheriff’s office permanently.

“John has agreed to stay on as a reserve deputy, so he will still be a part of training and a part of search and rescue,” Turner said. “There’s a continuity to it and we still get the benefit of his presence, which is terrific.”

In looking back over his time at the sheriff’s office, King also has seen similarities between law enforcement in Walla Walla and Los Angeles.

He said he sees a lot of the same criminals getting repeatedly arrested, serving jail time, being let out and arrested again.

“But most vivid is the influx of gang activity and rise in gang violence here. It’s something that needs to be handled and regulated,” he said, adding that the sheriff’s office needs more deputies and more people to be able to handle the problem.

“We’re very understaffed for what we want to do and what we are (required) to do,” said Turner.

Turner explained there is a big difference in being proactive and being able to prevent problems through intervention and being reactive when incidents occur.

“Most of the time we’re a reactive law enforcement agency because we don’t have the resources,” he said.

King said his decision to retire was based on several factors, including spending more time with his family and friends, and taking advantage of outdoor opportunities.

“I want to ... run around in the mountains and fish while I can still enjoy it,” he said, “and my mother has ailments I need to be attentive to. Three of my four kids live in Los Angeles, and now I’ll be able to see them whenever.”

He said he’s enjoyed a long run in law enforcement, and in moving here from Los Angeles he “wanted to experience working at a smaller agency.

“I’ve been very blessed in my whole career, but working at Walla Walla County Sheriff’s Office was kind of the icing on the cake,” he said. “There’s an outstanding group of men and women here, a very professional, quality group. I’m proud to have been a part of it.”

Even though King has been with the office for only a few years, Turner, now in his second term as sheriff, said he was glad he brought him in.

“In hiring John I wanted to share with the members of the sheriff’s office what law enforcement leadership can be,” Turner said. “John is a good living example of what quality law enforcement leadership should be.”

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