

Andy Strain entering ministry

Narc to swap badge for Bible

By GARY GREEN
Gazette Staff Reporter

Ten years ago the Gastonia City Police Department hired a ruffianly little alligator-wrestling police chief from a swamp town in Louisiana.

They hired him as a patrolman teamed him to work with a black patrolman (the first such team-up in Gastonia's history) and sent the two of them to calm down the angriest roughest section of town.

In the middle of next week that little man, who became known on the north side of town for his leather-wrapped lead blackjack and hot temper, will take off his gun, unpin his badge and pick up a Bible.

Sgt. A. J. Andy Strain is leaving the department Dec. 31 to become a preacher.

"That just goes to show you what can happen when the good Lord goes to work on you," says Strain, who admits that at

"My heart is filled with love now and, honestly, I can't say that I hate anybody. That's why I'm getting out of police work and going into the Lord's work."

—Andy Strain

one time "I'd rather whup a man as listen to him."

In 1970, Strain was taken off the street force and placed in the vice control bureau. In 1972 he became a sergeant in vice control and in 1973 became commander of the bureau.

He has made more than 1,100 arrests since he has been in the vice squad.

Strain says that he believes that drugs are the work of the devil.

"They destroy peoples minds so that they can't think straight," he said.

Strain also believes that drugs were introduced into the American youth

culture to boggle the minds of the future leaders of America. He believes that this was done through a communist plot.

"This is exactly what the communists are looking for: something to control peoples minds to control the way they think," he told a group of elders of his church.

STRAIN IS a member of Ridge Baptist Church on Old South York Road. It was there on Dec. 10 of this year that he got his license to preach.

My heart is filled with love now and honestly I can't say that I hate anybody.

That's why I'm getting out of police work and going into the Lord's work," he said.

I love to preach and tell people about the joy in my heart. You know how bad everybody says I am. If they can look at me and see the change that I have gone through then they will know that there has to be something to what God has to say," he continued.

"God has worked a wonder on me and because of the love I am now full of I can't be a police officer anymore. I've got to spread the word. I don't need the corruption and the hate that police have to put up with," he added.

I feel like that working for God and working for the police is working in two opposite directions. Locking a man in jail is just about as far away from telling him about God's messages as you can be," he explained.

The things that officers go through like fear and name-calling and all that, none of that has ever bothered me and none of it ever will. If God hadn't changed me the way he did I would still be in the vice squad," he said.

I've seen the good side of life and the bad side. I guess I've seen the worst of the bad side of life so I know what it is like all around. You're not helping a man by throwing him in jail. That's why I'm going to preach God's word."

STRAIN FIRST became a policeman in Mandeville, Louisiana which has a population of 6,600. He did it, he says, because he was interested in helping people.

He rose to chief and then came to Gastonia, he says, to get into a larger town and get out of the administrative role of police work and back with the people on the street.

"The people are what is important to me. Every case they call me about is important to me," he said.

A complaint about one joint (marijuana cigarette) is just as important as a complaint about 50 pounds of marijuana," he continued.

What I mean is that a person calling the police is calling because what they have to say is important to them. They have nowhere to turn with it except to the police.

And while to me their complaint may seem little or not important, to them it may be the biggest thing in the world. It may have taken a lot of them to call the police on something," he explained.

I don't have any cases or any of my arrests that were bigger or more important than any of the others. They were all important to someone and that is what I tried to do with my job as a police officer.

Whether I was investigating a complaint about loud noises in the neighborhood or about a pound of heroin, I tried to treat the cases the same. Like they were involving me. That way I could be fair and make them as important to me as they were to the people that called me," he said.

But I can help more people working for the Lord than I can working for the police," he said.

I'm still behind them, though. You know a commander is only as good as his men and in the vice squad I have five of the best men. I support what they're doing and I would be still at it myself if the Lord hadn't worked on me," he said.

But that's why I'm getting out of the police work, because God told me to go to work for him. I feel it is in my heart and I am happy as I can be," he exclaimed, taking a deep breath.

I'm going to hunt and talk for God, said Strain, who owns more than 40 hunting beagles.

"He's one of the finest vice officers this city has ever had, and I hate to see him go," said City Manager Gary Hicks.



ON THE JOB — Andy Strain left city vice squad commander is shown on the job in his law enforcement work, questioning two youths. Strain will leave the force next week to enter the ministry.