

## State and Local

# New police chief takes over in College Station

By Yvonne DeGraw  
Staff Writer

*Strope already familiar with problems in university towns*

Proud Aggies say their town just can't be compared.

But College Station's new police chief comes from another college town with many of the same characteristics and problems — a relatively low violent crime rate but a high percentage of auto theft and other property crimes.

Chief Michael L. Strope, 38, took over as chief of police Monday. He has been in town since Wednesday and already has glowing comments about College Station: dynamic, growing, friendly, warm and exciting.

An ancient Chinese proverb calls the last comment a curse, but few longtime residents complain that College Station is too exciting.

Strope directed the police department of Stillwater, Okla. for three years before accepting this job.

While Stillwater has 42,000 citizens, College Station had 37,000 in 1980. Oklahoma State University has 21,000 students to Texas A&M's expected 39,000 students this fall.

Strope's former department had 50 sworn police officers, while College Station has 68. His old budget was \$2.2 million. His new one is \$2.9 million.

The big difference, Strope said, is that Stillwater has no neighboring city like Bryan to make the area look larger.

"I'm looking forward to the challenges and the sharing of ideas that I think College Station offers," he said in an interview Friday. Deep brown eyes and a relaxed manner make these statements, which would seem idealistic and naive spoken by another person, believable.

The bare walls of Strope's office, in the new wing of the police department, were evidence of his recent arrival. Strope replaces Marvin Byrd, who retired in January after 14 years as chief of police.

He has had even less chance to settle in College Station. His wife, Debbie, and three children still are living in Stillwater. Their house needs to be sold so they can buy a new one. Debbie Strope, 37, with

whom Strope will celebrate his twentieth anniversary this September, will bring their two sons — Brandon, 13, and Ryan, 6 — to Texas in a month to a month and a half.

"In the meantime, I'll get to become a bachelor," he said. "I guess it's baloney sandwiches and TV dinners for me."

His daughter, Leighann, will stay in Stillwater for her last year of high school. He said she plans to major in journalism at Texas A&M after she graduates.

Strope doesn't stumble and fumble when talking about the ages, grades and interests of his children. He calls himself a home person.

"I'm what you would call a tinkerer around the house," Strope said. "By that I mean I'm not blessed with a lot of skills in repairing things and doing a lot of carpentry work, but I like to tinker with things and see how they work. I do a little fixing up around the house and a little yardwork."

He said he runs three to five miles each day. Hunting, fishing and softball are other pursuits he enjoys.

Judging from Strope's past activities and plans, it's likely he will spend much of his time working in the community in capacities other than police chief.

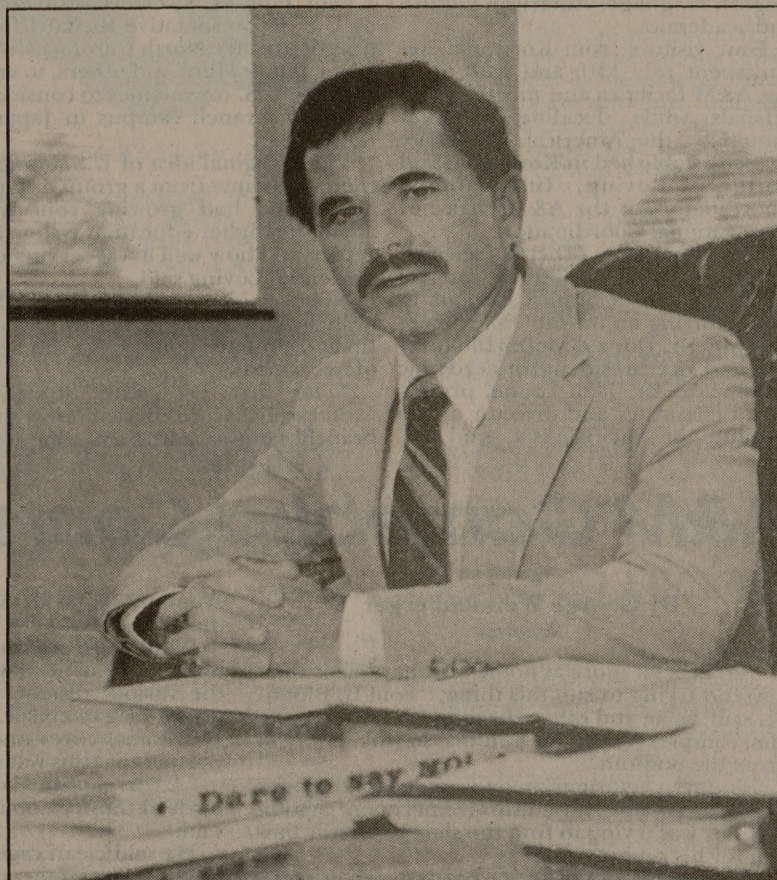
In Stillwater he was a member of the rotary club, the chamber of commerce, the Salvation Army board and the Starting Point (alcohol abuse prevention) board of directors.

"I hope to become a very active member of this community," he said, "not only in my position as chief of police, but also as a true member."

He said community involvement is the best way to fight property crimes — a common problem for law enforcement officers in college towns.

College Station has a solid base of neighborhood watches, but he said he would like to build on that. Watches are more difficult to establish in apartment complexes.

"There are some successful pro-



Michael L. Strope, College Station police chief

Photo by Sarah Cowan

grams that have been established, especially in apartment complexes where one or two key families that are not so transient agree to cooperate," he said.

Strope said he wants to work with apartment owners to increase security features like locks and lighted parking areas.

He said he also wants to be involved in organizations like the Parent-Teacher Association and A&M committees.

"In Stillwater I was on three committees with the student government president," Strope said. "I think if you keep those lines of communication open, you can work out potential problems before they become big issues."

But Strope hasn't made any specific plans for community involvement yet. He wants a chance to examine his choices first.

Strope does have specific plans for the police department, though.

And, as with his plans for civic involvement, his first goal is to assess the current situation.

He wants to see if all members of the department understand their responsibilities, authority and who they report to.

His second goal is to establish an ongoing training program for police officers and other department members.

"In-service training is critical for police officers in today's society where things change so fast," said Strope, who serves on the training and education committee of the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

He plans on requiring a minimum of 50 hours a year of training for each department member. The needs of the department would determine the topics, he said, but likely subjects are high-speed driving, weapons qualification, community relations, communication skills, writing skills and first aid.

Many people do not realize that 90 percent of police work requires skill in dealing with people, Strope said.

"Communication is more important in the long run than driving a car or shooting a weapon," he said. "If you cannot relate to people, you are handicapped as a police officer."

His third goal is to develop a comprehensive policy manual for the department. It would include steps to take when dealing with criminal investigations, hiring, pursuit driving and using force to make arrests.

Three years ago Strope wrote an article for Law and Order magazine titled "The Policy Manual: An effective management tool." He still believes that, and he hopes to issue College Station's manual within a year.

Five openings on College Station's police force attracted 170 applicants Saturday, but Strope wants to see even more aggressive recruiting.

"I think we have the responsibility of seeking the most highly qualified

individuals we can attract," he said. It is important to solicit applications, especially from minorities, rather than relying on classified advertisements, he said.

"As I understand it, there are at least four female officers in the department and three or four Hispanic and black minority members," he said. "That says something about College Station. Many other towns cannot boast that they have that many minority members."

"But I think we can do even better than that."

"This is a college town with international students, blacks and Hispanics. The department's got to mirror that makeup — as long as our standards are met, too."

With trade magazine publications, experience and an adjunct faculty member and a master of science degree, Strope can support his claim that he is comfortable with college students and faculty.

His master's degree in criminal justice administration makes him rare in his profession. According to Strope, a recent survey said only 5 percent to 7 percent of law enforcement administrators in cities as large or larger than College Station have a master's degree.

Originally Strope wanted to be a lawyer. But when he got married after a short time in college, he had to take a full-time job to support his wife, he said. He decided to try law enforcement for a few years as a background for the law degree he still planned to earn.

"I never had an idea that I was going to become a police officer," he said. "I was just going to try to get a taste of it. At the end of two years, it was firmly in my blood."

He found police work isn't anything like "Starsky and Hutch."

"It was a career that offered the kind of things I was looking for: working with people and working out problems," he said.

## Officials urge parents to keep children safe in car seats

By Christie Yeates  
Reporter

When transporting children, many people ignore the law and neglect to protect them from the No. 1 preventable cause of death for young children — injuries suffered from car accidents — officials at the Texas Department of Health said.

"Statistically, children have a 25 percent greater chance of living through a car accident if they are restrained in an infant safety seat," said Eddie Carmon, state trooper for the Texas Department of Public Safety.

Statistics compiled by the health department reveal that in a 30 mph crash, a 10-pound infant would be ripped from a person's arms with a force of almost 300 pounds.

A child restraint law passed in 1985 says a child up to 2 years of age must be secured in a child safety seat, while a child 2 to 4 years old must be either in a safety seat or have a seat belt on.

Despite the law's passage two years ago, about half of the children in Texas travel unrestrained by a child safety seat or protective shield, said Katie Womack, research sociologist for the Texas Transportation Institute.

About 8 percent of the unrestrained children are held in an adult's arms, Womack said. Some people think they can hold on to a child in an accident, she said, but the child often is hurled through a window.

Carmon said, "The big argument that parents give is that children

*"Statistically, children have a 25 percent greater chance of living through a car accident if they are restrained in an infant safety seat."*

— Eddie Carmon, DPS trooper

fight and won't stay in the car seat."

Children who weren't used to riding in the car seats when the law came into effect cause trouble because they aren't used to being confined, he said.

A way to prevent the children from resisting is to start carrying them in the safety seats as early as possible, he said.

"If a child is started the day he is brought home from the hospital in a

car seat, and he never knows there's any other way to ride, that's all he'll know and he won't resist," Carmon said.

But even a child who conforms to restraining seats still may be in danger, Womack said.

"Ten percent of the safety belts that are used are not used correctly," she said.

"Putting the child in the seat is not enough," Womack said. "The par-

ents must make sure the child is belted in properly, that the shield is in place and that the seat is anchored to the vehicle properly."

According to a TTI survey of 12 major cities in Texas, child restraint usage showed a decrease from 63 percent in 1986 to 54 percent in the first three months of 1987.

Womack attributes last year's high child restraint usage to the fact that the required safety belt law had only recently taken effect and attention was drawn to safety systems.

"With the passage of the law, there is voluntary compliance to some extent," Carmon said. "Even though there's a law, there are a lot of people who aren't restraining their children."

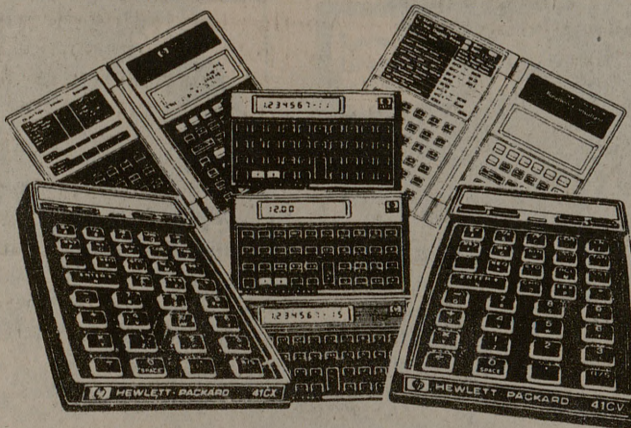
"The Texas Department of Public Safety writes an average of 7,000

tickets a month for safety-belt violations.

"People don't put their children in safety seats because the people don't think an accident could happen to them. They don't get in their car with the thought, 'I could have a wreck and die.' Many times people think it is easier to just get into the car and go rather than take the time to buckle the child in."

Several agencies in the Brazos Valley are concerned about the disregard for the child restraint law. Materials available from the health department, the Brazos Valley Development Council and the TTI state the advantages of using a child safety system for children under 4 and list ways to help children accept being restrained in a car.

**Students! Work Smart.  
Work Simply...  
With Hewlett-Packard!**



- 11C.....\$50.00
- 12C.....80.00
- 15C.....80.00
- 18C.....140.00
- 28C.....190.00
- 41CV.....140.00
- 41CX.....200.00
- 71B.....200.00

**Professional Computing**

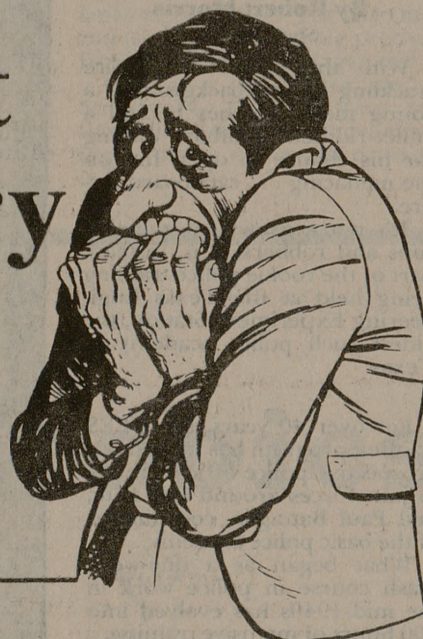
AUTHORIZED HEWLETT-PACKARD DEALER

505 Church Street • College Station, Texas  
(409) 846-5332

**Don't  
Worry**

when an accident  
or sudden illness  
occurs

CarePlus is open  
when you need them  
7 days a week  
with affordable  
medical care.



Pharmacy now open 7 days a week  
for your convenience

**CarePlus**

Medical/Dental Center

696-0683

1712 S.W. Parkway • C.S. Open 8am - 8pm  
(across from Kruger Center)

The Advantage is yours with a  
Battalion Classified. Call 845-2611

Coupon

INTERNATIONAL  
HOUSE OF PANCAKES,  
RESTAURANT

**\$2.99**

**Mon:** Burgers & French Fries  
**Tues:** Buttermilk Pancakes  
**Wed:** Burger & French Fries  
**Thur:** Hot Dogs & French Fries  
**Fri:** Beer Battered Fish  
**Sat:** French Toast  
**Sun:** Spaghetti & Meat Sauce

**All You Can Eat \$2.99** 6 p.m.-6 a.m.

no take outs must present this

August 31, 1987

**International House of Pancakes  
Restaurant**

103 S. College Skaggs Center