

Called to duty

Commander Sandra Renteria leads the way in police work

By Peter Madrid

IT TAKES A SPECIAL TYPE OF PERSON willing to consider a lifetime career in law enforcement. Phoenix Police Department Commander Sandra T. Renteria is one such individual.

However, her interest in pursuing such a career didn't come until she was in college, a time most young people have an idea of what they want to do the rest of their lives.

"I actually stumbled into it," Renteria recalls. "I was young, in college, and looking for direction. One day we were playing softball with some officers in Phoenix. One of them said, 'Sandra, you have the right personality to be a police officer. Just do it.' I never really considered it. So I applied, got a job, and I've been hooked ever since".

That was 1987. Since then, she has devoted three and half years service to the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, one and half years service to the Chandler Police Department, and for the past 16 years she's been a member of the Phoenix Police Department – and since Nov. 5,

2007 its highest ranking Latina.

A native of Phoenix and graduate of North High School, Renteria is commander for the Employment Services Bureau, which is in charge of recruiting and hiring new police officers. She is a graduate of Grand Canyon University, where she earned her bachelors and masters degrees.

In December she returned from three months of specialized training at FBI headquarters in Quantico, Virginia. It's a program to which just a few law enforcement officers nationwide are selected.

When asked if the experience was demanding, fulfilling, unexpected or challenging, Renteria says, "All of the above. It was able to give me some insight. I was lucky to be selected, but it was tough to be uprooted for three months. I lived in a dorm-like setting."

The program in which Renteria participated is geared toward mid- to executive-level law enforcement officials. The training is

standardized but also includes special training in leadership, tactics and new trends, for example. And with the city of Phoenix facing a financial crisis, Renteria faces a challenge in her position.

"This job has taken me from one extreme to the other," says Renteria, who took over when a proposition was passed, calling for public safety to add 400 new officers. "With the city growing I was told 'You need to make sure you hire, fill this position.' We were doing great, then all of a sudden the economy slows down. I'm told, 'Sandra, we can't do it. Now we need to stop.' It's been quite the balance, but it's been good."

What's also good for Phoenix is Renteria's visibility as a high-ranking Latina in a predominantly male field. She says she doesn't consider herself a role model. "I just hope that I can be a positive influence."

Renteria adds that she's proud of who she is and what she has to offer.

"I am very proud to be a Latina," she says. "I am also proud that I have the opportunity to represent the Phoenix Police Department and the city as a law enforcement officer. I don't think about it (her title) until people mention it. I'm humbled to represent the department and work for the city. I'm proud of this department because it is very supportive of diversity and promoting women."

Asked if she has any role model or mentors, she responds:

"I would just say my mom. She is one of the few angels who has walked the earth. She is the pillar of our family. She instilled my morals and gave me my ethical foundation: Hard work, drive, and really giving back to the community. She has instilled the right attitude for the position."

Her advice for young Latinas who perhaps are considering a career serving their country, state, or in her case, community?

"Stay focused on education. Focus on making good decisions. Good choices in life. Serving your community is very fulfilling because you're making a difference." ■



Sandra T. Renteria receives her promotion from Public Safety Manager Jack Harris.