



Berwick Beacon

Town of Berwick

April 2013

Town Council Members
Duval Arthur-Mayor Pro tem
Troy Lombardo
Edgar Thomas
Damon Robison
Greg Roussel

Special points of interest:

- www.sitesbylea.com/Recollections/
- Facebook search: "You Know You Are From Berwick If..."
- [History of South-west Reef Light-house](#)

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We are on the web.
www.townofberwick.org



Festivities at the Lighthouse

From The Mayor's Desk.....

I begin this message with my sincere gratitude to each of you for helping to make our Town all that it is today. As I travel across our parish, state and nation I strive to make the opportunity to 'brag' on our Town. More importantly, I brag on you - the people of Berwick. I beam with pride as I describe our progress, our safe neighborhoods, our clean and inviting environment; and our friendly hometown spirit. I hope that you share my sentiments and that you, too, are proud of Berwick.



When our Town was first formed, it was geographically a small area where folks saw each other every day. Through the years, our geographical configuration has presented some challenges from one end of Berwick all the way to the other end for people to really get to know each other. We no longer have a downtown area or a Main Street and, we can't change our geography. But I urge you to consider something. Now that spring is here, and summer right around the corner, use those extra hours of daylight and those warm temperatures to get out and socialize with the people living around you. Meet someone that you might not know; have a block party; invite your neighbors to sit in the front yard and 'visit'! Keep the 'unity' in your community. Let it be said that Berwick is truly a 'family friendly' town.

As always, I thank you for allowing me to serve in the leadership of our Town. I, along with the Council, strive to continue to grow our Town. With your help and support, we can and will do that!

May God Bless You All, *Mayor Louis Ratcliff*

In appreciation:

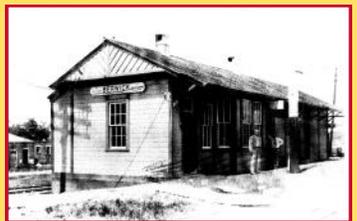
Indeed my 'cup overfloweth' with sincere appreciation for the wonderful opportunity to serve our Town as interim Councilwoman. When my husband, Matt, and I were transferred here in 1985 I prayed that we would be here long enough for our daughters, Kristi and Sam, to go all the way through high school. We didn't know a soul here, but this was our home and we were going to embrace the move and make it a positive in our life. Well, God is so good that 28 years later, we are still calling Berwick our home! Our first 2 years here, I had the privilege of teaching at Berwick High School. The staff and faculty warmly welcomed me and I quickly made dear friends whom I still cherish today. Even more so, the students welcomed me. Maybe they just had pity on the 'new teacher', but indeed those young people tremendously helped me. They taught me the culture, the history, who was related to who.... ok, you get the picture! Those young people made me feel like I was part of their family. I owe so much to each of them and hope to someday get the opportunity to personally thank them. Night after night I thanked God for our move to Berwick....and I'm still thanking Him. Since then, we have met the most wonderful people ever right here in our town. Perhaps, if you are reading this and not a native of Berwick, you, too, can identify with my story. I would venture to say that not many places are so gracious as our 'hometown'. So, when the opportunity came to serve our on our Town Council, I quickly signed up! While my tenure of service was short, I learned so much. You see, I believe that we are always a 'reflection' --- our actions, our speech, and our attitude reflects who we are, our family, our faith, organizations to which we belong, and it also reflects where we live. The 'reflections' my eyes have seen from Berwick folks have truly touched my heart. Through the years I have witnessed countless acts of kindness and neighborliness all across our town. While on the Council, I saw even more. For that and so much more, I say 'thank you'. May our hometown continue to be a beautiful reflection to all. I wish everyone peace, joy and happiness.

Many Blessings To All, *Jacki Ackel*

A LOOK BACK



1933 Berwick Bay Bridge under construction. Middle Span going up.



1940 Train Depot located at the end of Oregon St.



February 2013, Mr Alvin Willis is awarded the Beacon Shines On certificate for his service to the Berwick Development District.



New Councilman, Greg Roussel, was officially sworn in by Town Attorney Allen McElroy at the March meeting.



Former Council woman Jacki Ackel

Mayor and Council



Council Comments.....

It is our privilege and pleasure to once again bring to you our community newsletter, **THE BEACON**. Former Mayor Emmett Hardaway was the brain

Ready To Serve! child behind this publication. Today, we carry on that goal in the form of an online edition. Our plans are to publish the newsletter quarterly. We ask everyone to register your email address on the Town's website, www.townofberwick.org, to receive a notification alert when future editions are released. For residents who do not have access to a computer, there will be a limited number of copies available at the Town Hall. Additionally, past issues of the Beacon are archived on our website.

In other news, "*The Beacon Shines On*" award is given monthly at each Council meeting. Appropriately named in honor of our town's icon, the Lighthouse, this award was created to recognize someone from our town. We invite you to attend our Council meetings held on the second Tuesday of every month at 7 PM at the Town Hall. Pictures of recipients will be featured in **THE BEACON**.



St. Mary Parish Public Library Berwick Branch

Since the first library in the Town of Berwick was established in October of 1953, The St. Mary Parish Library (Berwick Branch) has had thousands of residents of Berwick and surrounding areas come through their doors. Berwick Branch Library is committed to serving our patrons with state of the art computers and programs to meet their needs. We strive to provide the best service and information for our patrons throughout the parish. Our services include a wide range of books including your favorite classics and have-to-read-it new releases. We also offer, among other things, free DVD rentals, free internet access, Overdrive e-book and audio services for all ages including help with your e-reader device. We have monthly programs for all age groups and we are gearing up for our Summer Reading Program "Dig into Reading", which offers many additional programs and performers throughout the parish.

Come visit our friendly staff, check out a good book or movie today, and grab a Lagniappe to see what we have to offer throughout the parish.



HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE TOWN OF BERWICK, LA.



(L to R) Jacki Ackel, Robert Thigpen, Chief James Richard, Eunice Cunningham, Keith Fontenot, Clarence Robinson, Janice McIntyre, and Lillie Rebardi

"A HIGH PERFORMING AGENCY"

Did you know that Berwick Housing Authority had its first official meeting to organize as a housing authority on April 11, 1956? By July 26, 1956 the then board was able to execute an Annual Contribution Contract with HUD Dallas/Fort Worth office. The visionaries who help establish the current agency were Carl Blum, Charles Bowman, Percy Francis, Louis Mahfouz and Lige Robison. The first housing development units allocated were a total of (30) units. The housing authority now has a total of (128) units.

Over the years the agency has been awarded many HUD accolades for being a model for small housing authorities. The agency has been a "**High Performing Agency**" since 2004 for excellent scores in the area of Finances, Timely Expending of HUD grant funding, and HUD REAC Inspection of the development sights. Overall the agency has maintained an average score of 95% for the noted reviewed areas. This could not be done without the assistance of the current board, staff, and the residents of the agency who appreciate living in public housing.

With the current financial status of the federal government, the Berwick Housing Authority is in a great position to stand firm during these tough economic times because of the "Vision" that was established in 1956 by the men who saw a need for housing assistance for those in need.

The Berwick Housing Authority has a website!!!!

To stay on top of what's going on at the Berwick Housing Authority go to:

www.berwickhousingauthority.com

Resident Luncheons, Monthly BINGO, Health and Job Fairs, Annual Flu Shots, Home Buyers Class, and much more take place at the Berwick Housing Authority.

National Night Out Against Crime 2013

Tuesday, October 8th

More information to come as we prepare for one of the greatest community efforts rid crime out of our community.....

Will you be taking a stand with us?

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Interesting information on former Berwick residents now residing elsewhere and who are competing and contributing on the national and international scenes.



Just mention the name V.J or Mr. V.J around town and the long-time residents of Berwick will know of whom you speak. But, for the more recent transplants we offer his "tale".

Vincent J. Bella was born July 29, 1927, in Berwick, Louisiana, the oldest child of Joseph Bella of Berwick and his wife Loretta Lam-po Bella of Patterson. He attended the Berwick Schools through the 9th grade and since Berwick did not have a High School at the time, continued his education at Morgan City High. He then attended Southwestern Louisiana Institute SLI in Lafayette(now ULL) for 2 semesters. Due to WWII, he left college to join the U.S. Marine Corp. and was honorably discharge in 1946. Mr. Bella continued his education from 1946-47 completing training at the Molar Barber College.

Professional, Legislative and Fire Service Careers

While still a teenager, V.J. joined the ranks of the Berwick Volunteer Fire Department. By 1951, he had risen to the rank of Chief of the department and would retain that position until 1991 when he would resign to become the Louisiana State Fire Marshal. During his tenure as BVFD Fire Chief, Mr. V.J. oversaw and personally trained a department with a membership that at times reached 50 members. Chief Bella provided fire protection and assistance to the Town of Berwick and her citizens, thoughtfully undertook the promotion and modernization of fire fighting apparatus and techniques, helped reduce the fire rating in the Town of Berwick from Class 8 to Class 4, with considerable savings on fire insurance premiums for the citizens and property owners of Berwick, and over-saw the inspections of commercial businesses, schools, public buildings and industrial facilities.

Mr. V.J. spent most of the next 20 years working in his family barber shop on Front Street in Berwick, where he became well known to most of the families in Berwick. Mr. Bella also found time to serve on the Berwick Town Council, as Scout Master of Berwick Troop 43, La. State Jaycees, and held every office in the Berwick Jaycees between 1949 and 1965. He would transition to the world of insurance and real estate and by 1969 had established the V.J. Bella Insurance Agency and was actively involved in real estate sales and investments. In 1972, the voters of District 50 would elect Mr. Bella to represent them in Baton Rouge as their State Representative. He would serve in that capacity until leaving office in 1991. Representative Bella chaired the House Retirement Committee and Fire Fighting Commission. Others that he served on were the Appropriations Committee, Transportation, Highways, and Public Works Committee, Ways and Means Committee, Criminal Justice Committee, Municipal, Parochial and Cultural Affairs Committee, Joint Committee on the Budget, Subcommittee on Revenue, and the Education Funding Subcommittee. While in the legislature, Mr. Bella was described as a critic of excessive government spending and waste. One of his proudest moments as a legislator was the passage of the helmet law requirement for the safety of motorcycle riders. Also while still a Representative, V.J. was appointed to the position of State Fire Marshal by then Governor Roemer, and would later serve in the same capacity under Gov. Mike Foster. The State Fire Marshal takes all steps necessary and proper to protect life and property from the hazards of fire and of panic which may arise from the threat of fire or explosion. Among the many accomplishments during his tenure were the securing of funding for construction of a new building to house the Office of State Fire Marshal, provided national leadership for introduction of Senate Bill 1798 for Federal Fire Safe Standards on Upholstered Furniture, assisted in the campaign to fund the purchase of the SPIRIT OF LOUISIANA fire trucks and arranged for delivery to the Fire Department in NYC following the 911 attacks, secured passage of House Bill 1630(Act 426) 2003 which established new rules for conduct of Fire Prevention Bureaus and relationships between bureaus and the Office of State Fire Marshal, established and maintained an Open Door policy which meant that Marshal Bella personally handled citizens' complaints. Other notable accomplishments while Mr. Bella served as Fire Marshall was to reorganize the office for more accountability and better communications with the various fire related industries and organizations, obtained new cars, uniforms, "state of the art" arson dogs, and modern communication devices for inspectors and investigators, provided advanced training for said staff, upgraded the La. Fire Incident Reporting System to compatibility with the rest of the United States, helped develop and implement the La. Fire Information Council and installed a toll free phone line to improve communication with the public and fire service organizations. Additionally, Mr. Bella helped secure the passage of House Bill 1848(Act 400) that established Statewide Building Codes and House Bill 1816(Act 1056) which rededicated the 1¼% tax on all fire insurance sold in La. to the Fire Marshal's Office.

When asked for some fond memories of his hometown of Berwick, V.J. recalls "working as a Barber side by side with my Dad. This is where I actually learned the most. It was the foundation for all of my other careers. I learned about people and got to know people from Berwick and their families. The people skills I gained there in the Barbershop made me successful in all of my endeavors throughout life. When I was in the Legislature I could relate to problems of people and communities because I learned all of that in the Barbershop." He also fondly remembers, "starting as a volunteer as a young boy in the Berwick Volunteer Fire Dept. in 1942. Then after coming out of the Marine Corps back into that Department. I was able to help make the Berwick Volunteer Fire Dept. nationally known. I have fond memories of the times spent with all of my firefighters and I still talk to them today although most of them are now deceased. Of course this ultimately lead to my becoming the State Fire Marshal." Mr. V.J. remains a frequent visitor to Berwick, returning regularly to meet with friends, family and community leaders. Upon his retirement as La. State Fire Marshal, Mr. Bella settled in Baton Rouge with his wife Grace. V. J.'s children are Marsha, Chad, Blaise, Bridget, Megan, Beau and Brad(deceased at the age of 11 from undiagnosed Type 1 diabetes). Blaise and Grandson Chad Bella, Jr. and their families reside in Berwick.

What follows is a listing of the numerous Associations and Public Service Organizations in which Mr. V. J. has held membership and Awards and Honors that have been bestowed upon him during his illustrious career. Mr. V. J. Bella is Berwick native son that our community can be proud of.

Associations and Public Service

Louisiana University Medical Sciences - Vice Chairman
Louisiana Fire Chief's Association - Charter Member
International Society of Fire Service Instructors - Charter Member
National Fire Protection Association, Life Member
National Fire Sprinkler Association
Emergency Preparedness Association
Pipeline Group
Life Member, National Association of State Fire Marshals
LA State Jr. Chamber of Commerce

Louisiana Fireman's Association - Life Member, also Past State President
International Association of Fire Chiefs
St. Mary Fire Association - Founder and Past President
National Association of State Fire Marshals, Past Board Member
International Association of Arson Investigators, Louisiana Chapter
LSU Center of Energy Studies, Advisory Council
Louisiana Life Safety & Security Association
Jaycees of Berwick

Other Public Service

Advisory Board for Native Americans in Louisiana
Governor's Rural Fire Protection Task Force
American Legion Post 38
International Order of Alhambra, Hiaya Caravan 130
Military Order of Devil Dogs, Pound 261
Louisiana State War Veterans Home Ancillary Committee
Cypress Sawmill Foundation
The Foundation for Historical Louisiana
Charter Member of the National World War II Museum

Indian Gaming Commission - Chairman
Morgan City/Berwick Chamber of Commerce
Choctaw Detachment, Marine Corp League
Military Order of Devil Dogs, Pound 182
Pound Keeper Military Order of Devil Dogs
Wedell-Williams Aviation Foundation
Walk of Honor Foundation – Fallen Firefighter Memorial, President
Certificate of Membership Automatic Fire Alarm Association, Inc.
Certificate of Appreciation 911 Memorial

Awards and Honors

Cross of Merit - Louisiana National Guard 1973
 Citizen of the Month - Morgan City/Berwick Professional Women 1961
 Citation of Merit - Muscular Dystrophy Association 1961
 Legislator of the Year
 Lifetime Support of the Fire Service -7th District Fire Department, Ascension Parish 1992
 Distinguished Service for Passage of Act 454 - Bayou Cane Volunteer Fire Department
 1993 Convention Dedication - Louisiana Fire Chief's Association
 Marine Corps League - Commandant - 1990-1991
 State Marine of the Year - 1995
 Certificate of Appreciation – United States Fire Administration
 Honored by Bella Drive at the L.S.U. Fireman Training
 Honored Italian American Digest Fall 2004 Article
 1st Distinguished Service Award, National Association of Fire Protection (NFAA)
 Person of the Year, Automatic Fire Alarm Association
 For State Service, House of Representative, HCR 14
 Military Order of Devil Dogs, Pound Dog of the Year 2008-2009
 Marine Corps League, Distinguished Service Award 2009
 Recognition by the Governor of the State of Rhode Island for
 hosting the 1997 NASFM Annual Conference

Devoted Service Award - Bishop Schexnayder Award 1974
 Citation of Merit - Law Enforcement & Firemen's Training 1966
 Outstanding Jaycee of the year 1961
 Outstanding Civic Leader of America
 Loyal and Dedicated Service Award - City of Baldwin
 84th Louisiana Firemen's Association Conference Dedication
 State Marine of 1995
 Devil Dog of the Year - 1995
 Choctaw Detachment Honor Platoon - 1992-1995
 Honored by V.J. Bella Central Fire Station
 96th Louisiana Firemen's Association Conference Dedication
 Greater Baton Rouge American Italian Association
 Fire Official of the Year, National Burglar and Fire Association
 Fire Service Person of the Year, American Fire Sprinkler
 Association & LA Fire Sprinkler Association
 Military Order of Devil Dogs, Pack Dog of the Year 2009
 Presidential Service Award, 2012 LA Life Safety & Security
 Association



1938 -V.J. at age 11



1967-President of State Firemans Assn.



2002-VJ Bella receiving Life Time Achievement Award from Kathy Taraba, Firestop Contractor Intl. Assn. President



Recollections of Berwick, LA"

By Nina Guzzetta

Republished Courtesy of Daily Review

From November 5, 1999

What has happened to all the Italian men in Morgan City and Berwick? They are forgetting their heritage and the old customs of their parents.

We meet at the coffee shop every afternoon from about 1:30 to 3 or 3:15 p.m. Recently, this Italian man asked me, "What is a biscotti? How do you pronounce biscuit in Italian? How do you say fig cake in Italian? and What is a Cannoli?"

Well, I said to myself, these Italians must have come from Cut-Off or Pecan Island because they know nothing about the Italian culture. They also asked me how do you pronounce gumbo in Italian and I answered, "Aqua-lordo!"

Morgan City or Berwick is in need of a really authentic Italian restaurant, with an Italian atmosphere - soft mandolin music; murals of gondoliers in Venice, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, and the Coliseum of Rome - all in warm colors adorning the walls. There would be waitresses in the Italian colors of red, yellow, and green threading in and out of the restaurant and the heavenly smells of Italian spaghetti, and sweet basil in the "polpetta." Serve excellent red and white wine and always have grated Parmesan cheese on the table with warm olive oil that you can dip hot Italian or French bread into. It is important that you never serve cold food or cold coffee or cold bread anytime.

I have lived here in the Morgan City-Berwick area all my life and I know that there are more Italian people here than any other nationality.

When my mother was living and somebody offered her fish, shrimp, or crabs for a Sunday dinner, she would chase them with a broom! No Cajun, or Mexican, or Chinese foods on Sunday - Sunday was "spaghetti day" with all the trimmings.

My mother's typical Sunday dinner was meatball spaghetti, or No. 7 chops in the gravy, or pork roast in the gravy, or Italian sausage in the gravy; with sweet peas or fava beans in season, fried cauliflower, fried eggplant with spaghetti gravy and cheese-baked apples, parched peanuts and, after the meal, a two- hour nap!

Remember the mayor of Bayou Pom Pom? A few politicians here should do as he did. Instead of using the traditional donkey or elephant as their emblem on the ballot, they should use the symbol of "Cajun land" - the noble crawfish.

Project Graduation



The idea of a safe and sober graduation night celebration was brought to St. Mary Parish 15 years ago by the Safe and Drug-Free School Coordinators, Diane Wiltz and Jacki Ackel. They had learned of this successful event at a state conference and wanted it desperately for our parish graduates. Based on a program that began with parents in St. Tammany Parish who wanted their graduates to celebrate this special night in a safe and alcohol/drug-free environment, the concept sounded like a blessing to Wiltz and Ackel. So, with a passion, they described the event to any and everyone who would listen at informational meetings across the parish. They explained that what made this event unique was that it is not school or school board funded -- it must be a gift of hard-working, dedicated parents. All across the parish, parents of high school juniors and seniors were

greatly interested, but it was only Berwick who committed to making this event a reality. For several years, it remained only a Berwick event; but now, several parent groups sponsor these wonderful celebrations at other high schools in our parish assuring the safety and security of students on a night made for memories!

The Berwick event features a 'fun-filled' night of planned activities such as listening and dancing to music, karaoke, candid photo shots, special fun games, collegiate inflatable games, all-you-can-eat food and refreshments, graduation and celebration videos, round-the-clock door prizes, grand prizes and breakfast before departing the next morning. The event starts at 10:30 PM on graduation night and concludes at 6:00 AM the following morning. Each year, Berwick parent volunteers work diligently to raise approximately \$15,000 - \$18,000 for this one night of celebration for our high school graduates.

Randall Monceaux, who was the first to lead this initiative, submitted these thoughts: "I was asked to become chairperson in the summer of 1999 by Mr. Melvin Childers. I accepted the position and drafted my wife, Debbie, to assist me. We stayed involved with Project Graduation for around 10 years before we turned over the 'chair' to Paige Roussel. We both feel very strongly about this organization and hope that more people get involved and keep it going for the future kids to come."

Monceaux also added: "Over the years that we were involved with Project Graduation, we have met some wonderful people that live in our town and the surrounding communities and they were always eager to help to make this organization a great success each year. Even during the hard years such as the down-turn of the economy, the passing of Hurricane Katrina, and we didn't think we were going to be able to have a Project Graduation due to the finances, somehow the parents pulled together and we had a successful event."

Randall and his wife, Debbie, thank all of the wonderful persons that were involved and all those who are involved now and the future supporters of this "GREAT" organization.

Current Chairperson, Paige Roussel, took the leadership with a passion and works tirelessly to make the event a reality every year. She writes: "It is a privilege and a blessing to be a part of Berwick Project Graduation. It is hard to believe that this will be our 15th year. Berwick Project Graduation is only made possible by the support of parents, families and businesses in our community. Every year we have new parents and grandparents shaking cans, selling po-boys, calling companies for donations, making cakes, and helping sell football pool squares. Without the efforts of all our volunteers we could not continue Berwick Project Graduation. "Amazing" and "Awesome" can get expensive!!! What makes Berwick Project Graduation so incredibly important to our community is the fact that it is all inclusive. EVERY student that graduates from BHS is invited. No one is left out. (We have a 90% or better attendance rate every year). It is a "Celebration of Life" that keeps our kids safe and provides for them their last memories of High School. It is always my prayer that our young men and women realize just how much their parents and this community cares about them. They are our future and it is bright."

Indeed, our Berwick graduates have much to be thankful for. If you are reading this and are the recipient of the "Gift of Love" Project Graduation night in the past, we are sure you will be smiling as you recall precious memories of that night. And perhaps, you will want to be a part of this for your children in the future. May Berwick Project Graduation continue forever!

"To Serve and Protect"

While the origin of this motto had its beginnings in California, many police departments across the United States have adopted the creed which officers daily live by. It started as a contest at the Los Angeles Police Department to find the perfect motto to describe the aim and purpose of a law officer's profession. Well, nothing could describe our Berwick officers more correctly than this motto, for indeed they *serve and protect* **us** 365 days of every year!

Our fine police department headed by the police chief did not always look the way it does today. From 1907 to 1966 it was, in fact, a Marshal's Office that was a one man department. Within our small town limit size, he often 'walked the beat'. There was not even a patrol car available. If he had to respond to a call beyond walking distance, he used his own car.

In 1966, the face of our law enforcement changed to a department headed by an appointed Chief of Police. Today's department consists of 12 state certified police officers including 4 dispatcher/jailers; 6 patrol officers; 1 assistant chief and 1 chief of police. Two of our officers are state certified firearms instructors. Berwick was the first law enforcement department in the parish to have in-car video cameras. Today, all units have car laptop computers which are accessible to the National Crime Information Center. Berwick Police Department handles all crimes committed in the town limits. The department is open 24 hours every day of the year. Also under the direction of the department are the animal warden and 2 part-time school crossing guards at Berwick Elementary. The agency has 6 marked patrol unit vehicles and 2 unmarked unit vehicles.

Berwick's jail has a capacity for 20 inmates. Those can include men and women, as well as juveniles on a very limited time frame. The jail operations are primarily funded by the Town of Berwick.

Our town has quite a record in the stand against crime. Statistics from the past 30 years show the following:

	<u>Citations Issued</u>	<u>Arrests Made</u>	<u>Accidents Handled</u>
2012:	774	301	137
2002:	636	285	136
1992:	781	412	150
1982:	1,078	691	184

All would readily agree that those statistics are quite impressive. And for the residents of Berwick, we hope that their thoughts are 'this quite comforting and assuring'!

In a recent interview with Chief of Police James Richard, the Chief praised the officers of his department validating their aim to truly serve and protect. The camaraderie among those in the department epitomizes our Berwick hometown spirit.

Chief Richard also issued a plea to the residents of Berwick to please adequately mark the address on the front of your residence. He said that it greatly aids the officers responding time when they can quickly locate the address. Additionally, he reminds everyone that even though we live in a safe place, it is just good practice to always lock your vehicles, residence and structures.

Top row (L to R) Shaun Liner, J.P.
Henry, Quentin Menard, Gina
Dehart, Judy Pellerin, Reed Gros.

Bottom row (L to R) Asst. Chief
David Leonard, Billy May, Michael
Bourgeois, Lt. Curtis Rebaradi, Billy
Chapman, Chief James Richard.

