



By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

Chase County Sheriff-elect Kevin Mueller is looking forward to getting started.

Winning the sheriff's office in last week's General Election, Mueller was in Imperial last Thursday picking up campaign signs, meeting with some county officials and looking at homes. "I'm really looking forward to it," Mueller said about his new job.

He'll be finishing up as a one-term sheriff from the larger Keith County, 45 miles north of Imperial, the end of this year, and will take over duties in Chase County officially on Thursday, Jan. 6, 2011.

He said he's anticipating the move back to his hometown. He and his wife are hopeful of buying a house soon.

"I've always liked living here and its slower pace. It won't be hard to make the change," he said. He especially won't miss the law enforcement coverage of Lake McConaughy in Ogallala, he noted.

As Chase County Sheriff, there will be a change in the number of employees he'll direct.

As sheriff in Keith County, Mueller had seven full-time deputies, four to six part-time deputies, six jailers and a secretary.

In Chase County, there are three deputies and six dispatchers/jailers within the sheriff's office. He already knows he'll have one deputy position to fill here. Vince Lopez is leaving for a position in Cherry County.

Mueller said he hopes to bring in a former deputy he worked with in Keith County as his Chief Deputy here. They are working out the details, he said.

All of the other current deputies and dispatcher/jailers in the Chase County Sheriff's Office will have the opportunity to stay on in their positions, he said.

Mueller said there will be a few changes and some things will be run differently after he takes office next year.

So what kind of sheriff will Mueller be?

"One concern I've heard was that if I came back would I be really aggressive," Mueller said.

He noted the sheriff's office is a unique one in law enforcement, in that there are a number of duties that are mandated by state statute, such as courtroom security, civil paper service, sheriff's sales, etc.

After those duties are met, he said his major priority will be to be proactive.

"We will have deputies on both day and night shifts; there will be some coverage at nights," he said.

That doesn't mean someone will be on duty all through the night, he said, but there will be a deputy on a portion of the evening hours.

He said the public can also count on seeing his officers out on patrol. However, working traffic

and issuing tickets will not be at the top of his list.

He said he's learned over the years that not everyone needs a ticket, and not everyone has to go to jail. Each situation is unique, he said.

He believes the most important aspect of his job, after the mandated requirements, is to be available for calls from the public.

"That's what we are here for. If we are called, we need to respond and do our best to solve the problem," Mueller said.

Early next year, Mueller said he would like to sit down with emergency response personnel in the county, including fire departments, the Imperial police department, State Patrol and EMS.

One of the discussion areas will be accident coverage, he said.

"We will work and cover accidents," Mueller said.

If the State Patrol is not available, his office will handle the call. He noted both the sheriff's office and State Patrol can work accidents in the rural parts of the county.

He noted in Keith County, when an accident or situation was serious enough, the city police also came out and assisted, much like the Imperial police do here.

"Here in rural law enforcement, we are few and far between so we have to rely on each other," he said.

There will be times when his officers are not on duty physically, but said they will be called out if need be.

"We work weekends, and holidays. That's why it's called a profession," he said.

He believes 22 years of experience in Keith County will benefit his office in a smaller Chase County. He also worked as an Imperial police department officer from 1984-88.

"I've seen a lot of things up there that we'll probably never see here," he said.

He was involved in the investigation of three homicides during his time in Keith County, as well as several other major crimes.

That investigation experience he gained will be helpful in this county, he believes.

Training is an area that Mueller is very adamant about.

"One can never get enough training. You should never quit learning," he said.

He has attended two FBI schools for law enforcement executives, as well as a U.S. Department of Justice Rural Law Enforcement Technology Institute.

In August, Mueller graduated from the Rural Executive Management Institute, after four days of training in Chicago. The training was designed to prepare rural law enforcement executives for the unique challenges they face as agency heads of small law enforcement agencies.

When asked about why he believes he won the election, defeating a two-term incumbent, Mueller said, "I think people maybe just wanted a change, maybe a different type of law enforcement."

He was in the county several times since he launched his petition drive in June, meeting with such groups as the fire department and going door-to-door. He also was at the Chase County Fair and Imperial's 125th celebration this summer.

Dan Thompson of Imperial and Dave Ridlen of Enders headed up his petition drive here.

His son, Justin, of Champion helped "a little" with the campaign, and his dad, Richard, was also involved until he became ill, Mueller noted, as was his wife, Marsha. His daughter, Teran, and husband live in Chadron. His mother, Betty, resides in North Platte.

If there was a disappointment in the campaign, it was that his dad passed away in October, and wasn't able to see him win the election.

"He was a big supporter," Mueller said.

