

Detective Reflects on His Career

The same year then Sgt. Dave Dean joined the Troy Police Detective Bureau, the cop who then had 14 years under his belt would be thrown into the biggest case of his career. Detective work consumed his life thereafter, he said.

After Albany Police informant Christopher Drabik was gunned down in Lansingburgh in December of 2003, Dean spent the next year and a half working full-time on that compelling case that saw three men sentenced to life in prison, with ringleader Michael Hoffler currently awaiting a second trial after his conviction was tossed on a technicality.

Dean has worked 60- to 80-hour weeks ever since, he said.

“Your life cannot come first,” he said of being a detective. “You have to be willing at any moment to walk away from the people you love and what’s good for you. It’s no longer about what’s good for you or your life.”

“The day Chris Drabik died, I didn’t come home,” he continued. “I always tell everybody I left at 8 in the morning and came home two years later.”

But after 20 years on the force, he is coming home for good — at least from the police work. The 40-year-old will retire Tuesday and begin a new job next month in marketing and public relations with Albany law firm Tully Rinckey PLLC.

While the father of three is anxious to amend any damage the long hours have done to his personal life, he said he won’t forget the satisfactions of police work.

While it was the high-profile Drabik case that is best remembered, it was an earlier case that got him drummed up for the detective job. He was part of a team that nabbed George P. Terry III, who was later convicted of raping two women.

“The city was in fear,” Dean recalled of the 2003 crimes. “We developed our working procedures in that we worked arduous hours on it. To be involved in something that had such big implications for the whole city was huge. It got us all ramped up for that job.”

And then came Drabik, and the realization of what it meant to hunt not just a rapist, but a killer — “the big show,” Dean called it.

“You have to be a detective to have that honor bestowed on you to investigate the taking of another person’s life,” he said. “There’s no more trust a governmental entity or a community can put into you.”

But he didn’t start as a detective. He began his police career in Troy, where his father Thomas was on the police force for more than four decades, in 1989 as a patrolman. He also worked as an evidence technician before becoming a sergeant in 1997.

He headed the department’s Street Crimes Unit for a year after its inception in the summer of 2007, and said he’s proud of the drop in violent crime that followed. He also briefly headed the narcotics-oriented Special Operations Section earlier this year while working as the

department's public information officer, and also served as a deputized U.S. Marshal.

Not everyone in the department liked the apparent ease with which he seemed to grab top spots. The police officer's union challenged several moves that put him in those positions, arguing other cops with more years on the force were overlooked.

One thing all those job titles inarguably did was add up to a whopping amount of overtime: Dean was the city's highest paid employee in 2008, raking in over \$150,000, including those extra hours.

But all those hours are ones Dean said he could not spend as a family man. His son David Jr. works overnight patrol for the Troy Police Department, and he has two daughters, ages 6 and 8.

He lost another daughter, 10-year-old Ashleigh, and his first wife Sheri in a 1999 car accident. He said the overwhelming support he received from the department at the time brought him closer to his job.

But he said it takes a special breed of person to be both a cop and a family man and still succeed on both fronts.

"I was not one of those people," Dean admitted. "As long as I stay here, my whole life and my whole being will be about work. And knowing that, I cannot continue. I'm going to shift that focus to my children."