

Wildlife trooper: Fulfilling a dream of 4 decades

By Branden Andersen / *The Bulletin*

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Marv Ritter was 12 years old when he had his first interaction with an Oregon state trooper. He was returning from a successful deer hunt with his father, grandfather and grandmother when a trooper congratulated him on his big catch. "He kept telling me how great my buck deer was," Ritter said. "I thought it was the coolest thing in the world. It stuck with me."

Forty years later, at age 52, Marv Ritter received awards for both academics and physical fitness while becoming the oldest person to graduate from the Oregon State Police Academy.

Since 2010, he has earned seven awards for officer bravery and excellence. Now 60, he added two more to the trophy case in June: Oregon State Police Fish & Wildlife Officer of the Year and Shikar-Safari Wildlife Officer of the Year.

The John Day-based trooper is not quick to recognize his achievements but does recognize their significance.

"It was remarkable," said Ritter, who patrols Central and Eastern Oregon. "This is kind of a lifelong dream coming true."

Ritter wasn't always planning on being a trooper. After graduating from high school in Pleasant Hill, southeast of Eugene, he worked various odd jobs before deciding to attend the University of Oregon. In 1980, he earned his bachelor's degree in business administration, leading to a job with Portland General Electric in a cubicle-filled Portland office.

"It was the whole high-rise, suit-and-tie experience," Ritter laughed. "It wasn't for me."

After six years, he moved out to Eastern Oregon and worked in real estate, eventually starting and selling his own real estate company. Ritter said he enjoyed the jobs' stability and ability to provide for his family.

"Most of us have prior careers," said OSP Sgt. Tim Brown, who oversees Ritter. "He is a very talented interviewer and investigator, which was probably helped by his experience in real estate."



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After his children had grown up, Ritter felt it was time to finally chase the dream that had been beckoning him for the past four decades.

On his 50th birthday, in 2003, he was hired by the Washington County Sheriff's Department. He worked there for about 1½ years, then moved over to the Baker County Sheriff's Department. Shortly after, he heard that the Oregon State Police were hiring.

"I decided to throw my hat in the ring," Ritter said. "I didn't expect much of it, but they hired me."

Ritter started by working patrol in La Pine, thoroughly enjoying his job but hoping to move to the Fish and Wildlife Division.

"It was my dream from the start," he said. "Had it been an option, I would have taken it right away."

Over the past eight years, Ritter said he has done everything from checking hunting permits to uncovering illegal elk-hunting practices to catching poachers who were shooting small-caliber bullets into farmers' cattle.

"In the Fish and Wildlife Division, we usually don't get a lot to start working off of," Brown said. "Marv has a knack for taking the smallest lead and uncovering an investigation."

Brown cited an example in the cattle investigation. Ritter found beer cans around the site of the shooting, took them in, pulled DNA from the cans and continued investigating. Sure enough, a person was arrested later whose DNA matched that found on the beer cans. After further investigation, Ritter identified four shooters, two of whom were charged with felonies.

"Hard work and tenacity," said Lt. Don Wagner of the Fish and Wildlife Division's East Region. "Ritter leaves no stone unturned. He's constantly working on high-level cases."

It's not just his investigative skills that brought success. In 2010, Ritter saved a 90-year-old man from his mostly submerged car in the freezing John Day River.

Ritter put on a life jacket, tied a rope to himself and pulled the man from his car, according to The Oregonian. Ritter won two awards in the state of Oregon for the heroics, according to an Oregon State Police media release.

Overall, Ritter said he likes to collaborate with other departments in investigations. He said he's working on one now that he cannot say much about, but that it's one that has required a lot of teamwork and perseverance.

"You'll hear more about it soon," he said.

Despite his age, Ritter hopes to keep working as a Fish and Wildlife trooper. He said that he is a realist about aging, but he is going to try his best to stay in shape and stay healthy.

Retirement, he said, is hardly on the radar.

"I'm still having fun," he said.

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