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35-year police detective retires; three others promoted

By Nick Bonham

He traded his gun and badge for a foam finger and air horn.

Actually, those who know Sgt. Elias "Rudy" Manzanares know he's not the hoot-and-hollering type. The rowdy sidelines and bleachers of sporting events is where he says he'll spend much of his time now.

After 35 years Manzanares, who spent the last five years running the crimes against persons unit at the Pueblo Police Department, called it a career Dec. 28.

He will be replaced by Sgt. Eric Bravo, a 12-year-veteran of the force.

Well-re-spected among his peers, Manzanares' career highlights are long and exemplary, with commendations from each of the five Pueblo police chiefs he worked under. He also received commendations from former La Junta police Chief Chuck Widup and from former prosecutor Scott Epstein, who is now a retired judge.

Manzanares has "been key in the great success in solving rapes, robberies and murders here in the last five years," Chief Jim Billings said. "To have that many written commendations, I think speaks very highly of Rudy."

As sergeant of the crimes against persons unit, Manzanares supervised some of the city's top investigations, from homicides and home invasions to strong-armed robberies and assaults.

That meant often dealing with the media, with whom he formed a reputation of being tight-lipped.

During a recent interview at his retirement party, Manzanares still managed to say as little as he could to a reporter. Only this time instead of an investigation hanging in the balance, he was busy playing "Grandpa."

"When you have five grandkids and they're all into basketball, I'm going to be a sports fan now," the 56-year-old said.

In terms of seniority, Manzanares retires as the department's No. 2, second only to Deputy Chief John Ercul, who oversees the entire investigations unit.

"I hate to lose Rudy as an investigations supervisor. He has a wealth of knowledge and we're going to miss him," Ercul said.

Manzanares went to work for the Pueblo Police Department on Nov. 26, 1972. He was 21. (His career with the city started the year before, when he went to work as a sanitation laborer.)

He went through the department's first basic training academy, which then only took 80 hours to complete, compared to today's 500-hour course.

Manzanares was promoted to corporal on Sept. 1, 1978. He had to test for the rank, which is now given based on seniority. He transferred from patrol to investigations in November 1986.

It was about this time, before his transfer, that Manzanares made a lasting impression on Chief Billings, then a sergeant.

"We had a standoff in a front yard with a man who knew martial arts. This guy was swinging and twirling this bar over his head," Billings recalled. "It was a situation that called for use of deadly force, but none of us wanted to do that. Rudy somehow timed this guy's actions and managed to race in and tackled him. It was one of those situations that could've ended badly. That still impresses me to this day."

Manzanares remained in investigations until 2002 when he was promoted to sergeant and was sent back to the streets to patrol during the afternoon shift.

He transferred back to investigations in January 2003.

"He's the best boss I've had in the 20 years I've been down here," said Detective Mark Bravo.

Of Manzanares, Detective Glen Fillmore II said, "He's the best sergeant I've worked for."

Manzanares was the second sergeant to retire last month. Sgt. Greg McCaulley retired Dec. 1.

Cpls. Brad Unger and Mark Duran were promoted to sergeants at Friday's ceremony.