

Northwest Arkansas Oral History Project
James Wozniak Interview Abstract
July 10, 2018

Interviewee	James Wozniak
Year of birth	1949
Place of birth	West Allis, Wisconsin
Interviewer	Susan Porter
Interview date	2018-07-10
Interview location	Bella Vista Historical Museum, Bella Vista, Benton County, Arkansas
Keywords	<p>Wozniak, James Wozniak, Sue Porter, Susan Bella Vista, Benton County, Arkansas Property Owners' Association; Bella Vista, Benton County, Arkansas Sheriff's Department; Bentonville, Benton County, Arkansas Police Department; Bella Vista, Benton County, Arkansas Quorum Court; Bentonville, Benton County, Arkansas Crime Watch; Bella Vista, Benton County, Arkansas Operation Good Morning; Bella Vista, Benton County, Arkansas City government Community policing Police Wonderland Cave; Bella Vista, Benton County, Arkansas</p>
Description	<p>People relocate to Northwest Arkansas from many places and for many reasons. Career and family brought James Wozniak and his wife from Wisconsin to Bella Vista in 1977. Between then, his appointment as Chief Deputy in 1993, and his retirement as Police Chief in 2009, police work and his role would change. So would the community he served. Wozniak describes the early years of his career in the Bella Vista Police Department (BVPD) as doing 'a whole lot with nothing.' Staff, trained at the State Academy, was small and turned over regularly. Often an officer worked alone. That meant a strong relationship between the police and fire department personnel was crucial. In those years, the police force had two bosses, Property Owners' Association (POA) and Benton County Sheriff's Department. Wozniak vividly remembers balancing directives from the two. The POA controlled the budget, salaries, and rules for accepting grants. At the same time, the police force was under the jurisdiction of the Benton County Sheriff's Department and often functioned like a substation. If the residing Sheriff did not approve of an action, he could rescind the BVPD's authority. A court case in 1984 resulted in change to these laws and gave the BVPD greater leeway. When Bella Vista incorporated in 2007 things got better; better</p>

	<p>budgets, equipment, salaries, accountability, increased staff, and a police retirement plan.</p> <p>When asked about the changes he experienced during his career, Wozniak shared stories of: cars being assigned to officers so they could take them home; acquisition of radios, computers, and tasers; an experiment to put a plow on the 4WD police jeep; and Police Department offices changes.</p> <p>Looking back on his career, Wozniak proudly points to accomplishments of the Crime Watch, Christmas Watch, Shop with a Cop, Drug Incinerator, Operation Good Morning, and Citizen Policing activities. This last program, the Citizen Policing, made community policing a reality in Bella Vista before it became an everyday phrase elsewhere. The program had police officers being visible, doing whatever it took to make a difference and have good relations – ‘we showed up and stopped by.’</p> <p>During Wozniak’s tenure the department faced routine and unusual incidents. He recalls visits to Wonderland Cave, convincing a man to let his hostage go, and arresting a guy with 7 DWIs.</p> <p>Following his retirement, Wozniak spent time on the Quorum Court and Bella Vista City Council. One of his stories provides the background the new City’s role with the Historical Museum, Library, Cemetery, and Animal Shelter.</p> <p>Wozniak calls Bella Vista a good place to raise a family. It’s where he and wife, Sue, raised their two children. He says ‘he’s not going anywhere.’</p>
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Questions or Comments	https://nwaoralhistory.org
Interview sidebar	<p>Bella Vista had a community policing approach before it was a popular catchphrase. In Wozniak’s words ‘did it because we were small and needed to be out amongst the public and let them know who the [the police] were and what [we] did.’</p> <p>[01:32:24]</p>