

Raider Highlight

Archbishop Rummel High School



Retired State Trooper Pinero, '80, is new Dean of Students

“I’ve found in most of my dealings with individuals, even in the midst of a crisis, that people want to know what’s expected of them. Then, for the most part, they do it,” said (Ret.) Louisiana State Police Captain Robert Pinero, ’80, and the new Dean of Students at Archbishop Rummel High School.

His idea that people basically want to cooperate with authority has been his philosophy through his law enforcement career, and he is now using that same belief in his new role as disciplinarian at his alma mater.

Since becoming Dean of Students in August, he has seen similarities between the attitude he experienced with the State Police and the day-to-day operations he has had with the Archbishop Rummel student body. He continued, “If individuals stray from doing right, and realize they have, then they’ll try to do better next time.”

This 27-year veteran of law enforcement never thought he would be patrolling the hallways of Archbishop Rummel like he did the streets of the parish during his years with the Jefferson Parish Sheriff’s Office and the Louisiana State Police. He said he began thinking about life after the State Police about five years ago when he knew his eventual retirement would be forthcoming.

“I started looking around to see what was out there. And since I was here all the time with my boys, this was my alma mater, and I knew the people here, I thought I’d submit a resume’ to see if they needed a history teacher. My son Matthew dropped it off to Mr. (John) Gabriel,” he explained.

Pinero said he spoke with Assistant Principal Gabriel on the phone and he set up an interview with Mr. Thomas Moran, principal designate, in April to talk about a teaching position. In a second interview, Mr. Moran brought up the Dean of Students job availability.

“Mr. Moran may have made mention about the Dean of Students position in the first interview, but I didn’t think too much about it. I didn’t really know what it was nor did I think I had qualifications for it. Then we talked more about it, and I thought it was a good opportunity for me to work with all aspects of the school. I could have a small part in working with everybody,” he said.

In May 2008, he was named the school’s first alumnus to head the Dean of Students office at Archbishop Rummel. Little did he know back in 1980 that he would have a career in

law enforcement that would eventually include his high school. His original plans were to study marine biology at UNO.

"I enjoyed my days at Rummel and especially liked Brother Del Harris, FSC, who was so unusual, and Mr. John Niemi, who was just an interesting person. I found Brother Leo Harvey, FSC, so easy to talk to and he was so laid back for being such a big man," he said.

Upon graduation he attended UNO for three semesters before he accompanied a buddy to a job interview.

"A friend of mine, who graduated with me, Ronnie Jacobs, '80, wanted to apply for a job at the Sheriff's Office, and since I knew where to go, I went along for the ride. When I was there, the recruiting guy, who knew my brother, JPSO deputy Jules Pinero, '75, said that I should fill out the deputy application as well. I did and they offered me a job," he remembered.

In 1982 he was a JPSO deputy who worked in the Avondale and Marrero areas and did routine patrols for 18 months. Again on a whim, he applied to be a State Trooper, did the paper work, and got the job.

"Back in September 1983, at age 20, I wanted to try something different and was encouraged by some of the guys with the State Police, so I applied but didn't think I would get hired because I was too young," he said.

After having completed the Training Academy in Baton Rouge, he worked traffic investigations for three years in New Orleans. During that time he received special training in Chemical Response involving chemical spills, transportation vehicles, and tank trucks.

In 1986 he was named Louisiana's Hazardous Materials and Explosives Control Unit specialist and remembers several major incidents during his years on the job. They include the tank car release that occurred during Pope John Paul II's papal visit to New Orleans, the Shell Oil explosion, and the Christmas Eve explosion and tank fire at the Exxon Refinery when the temperature dropped to single degrees.

"Probably the most memorable event was the Space Shuttle Columbia that disintegrated over Texas upon its return to Earth. A lot of the shuttle's debris landed around the Fort Polk area, so the State Police recovered many parts of the shuttle.

"One of our guys actually found a letter from a grade school in Israel that was carried onboard the shuttle by an Israeli astronaut. That was really touching," Pinero said.

Deputy Pinero became Sergeant Pinero in 1996, and two years later was promoted to Executive Officer for the Bureau of Investigations. He said that in order to advance within the ranks of the State Police, troopers must work in different divisions. Since he had never done investigative work, he thought the new job would be beneficial to him.

"I went from having six people working under me to having responsibility for 300 to 400 people," he said. "During that time gaming became legal, so we were involved with all the



Robert Pinero shows a picture of the massive fire at a refinery.

regulations for casinos for the first time. Those were tough times with lots of politics involved in the regulation.”

Moving up the State Police ladder again, Captain Pinero was named Commander of Narcotics Enforcement for the entire state in 2000. He supervised mid and upper level narcotics dealer surveillance and oversaw long term investigations involving lots of money and drugs.

Pinero changed titles again six months later when he returned to the Hazardous Materials office just in time for 9/11.

“Prior to September 11, everything we did was about safety but after the terrorist attacks, everything became security. Before 9/11, we would put out ample information about a train filled with chemicals so firemen or law enforcement agents would know about it, but after September 11, we were concerned that same information would be obtained by somebody to purposely cause harm,” he explained.

Immediately after 9/11, he said the country’s anthrax scares occurred, and his Hazard Materials division investigated had over 6,000 responses to anthrax scares with an office staff of just 20 people.

“It was a crazy time. People thought mold on oranges was anthrax or sugar at banks was anthrax. It was complete and utter panic,” he said.

The first national event following 9/11 was the annual Super Bowl held in the Louisiana Superdome, and Pinero's office was intrinsically involved in the security planning of the event. He said the government was still in flux following 9/11 and responsibilities for such events went from the FBI to Secret Service and there was much confusion as to who was responsible for what.

And then Hurricane Katrina came in August 2005.

“Katrina was obviously the biggest disaster that any of us has ever dealt with in our lives,” he said. “Immediately afterwards, we checked the Troop B Headquarters on Williams, and everything was ok. We thought we had dodged the bullet, but we had absolutely no communications with other agencies,” he said.

Captain Pinero said the next day the State Police started to realize that all was not well since the water was rising and the only access to the city was via the West Bank and only on elevated bridges. Several days later helicopters began picking up stranded residents and dropping them off along I-10.

“There was no coordination whatsoever. A trooper witnessed the first helicopter dropping off evacuees along I-10 at Causeway, and by daybreak the next day, we saw 10,000 people there with no water, no food, and no facilities. We knew it was happening but didn’t know it was supposed to happen,” he explained.

He said cooperation among city, parish, and state officials was not the problem; the concern was coordination. He said there were no communications available, no telephones, no radios, and only dead cell phones.

“To speak to a city or parish official, you had to locate him and physically go there to speak face to face,” he said.

“The Superdome was a mess, but it was not the violent place everyone described. That never happened. It was a mess because it was not ready to handle that many people for so long a time. To get to the Superdome, I had to enter the city from the West Bank, drive down

Howard Avenue to Loyola, and then walk through the New Orleans Centre. I entered the Superdome, walked across the building and never observed any problems,” Pinero reported.

He said the people were tired, scared, and hot and didn’t know what was happening. He did witness some looting on the streets but said the problem was not controlling the looting but rather finding places to house the looters.

By this time Pinero was approaching the end of his career with the Louisiana State Police.

“The way the LSP retirement system works, a trooper gets to the point where it’s not financially beneficial to continue working. So for five years I’ve been studying options for my retirement years,” he said.

During his law enforcement years, he had received his BS degree in sociology from LSU and teacher certification from UNO, so his career was moving from law enforcement to education. He had planned to retire in April 2008, but little did he know that he was about to make a 360 degree return to Archbishop Rummel High School.



“My wife and I had talked about this whole transition from the State Police to something new, and she was aware of the Rummel opportunity, but my sons did not know yet,” he explained. “My son Matthew had graduated in May, so I was just concerned how Mark felt about it and if it were something he’d be comfortable with, but he did not hesitate. He didn’t think it would be a problem at all for him.”

In addition to UNO freshman Matthew and Rummel sophomore Mark,

Disciplinarian Pinero and his wife, Colleen, also have a set of twin girls, Madelyn and Maria, who are third graders at St. Charles Borromeo School in Destrehan.

On the job now for the first quarter, he finds most of his dealings are with students referred to him by teachers for minor classroom disturbances. He said that he and the students talk about why they are in his office, figure out ways to correct the issues, and then move forward.

“I am enjoying this new job very much. I’m having a great time,” said 27-year local and state police veteran and Dean of Students rookie Robert Pinero, ’80.

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EDITOR’S NOTE: *This is the next in a series of website feature articles that will highlight outstanding achievements of Archbishop Rummel High School alumni, faculty members, parents, or students. The website intends to make this “Raider Highlight” feature a weekly link on the front page of the site.*

So we can feature other prominent individuals, please submit names of persons from our school family who are doing outstanding work in their fields. If you know of anyone who

could be featured, please email Joseph Serio, communications director, at jserio@rummelraiders.com or news@rummelraiders.com . Please check weekly for updates to this "Raider Highlight" link on the Archbishop Rummel website.