

HIGH PROFILE

Power Broker:

America's Sheriff Errol Toulon, Jr.

BY TODD SHAPIRO

In January of 2018, Suffolk County became safer. This was the month that Errol D. Toulon, Jr., assumed the position of Sheriff -- Suffolk County's highest ranking law enforcement official. Elected that prior November, Toulon brought to the table a skill set that few possessed, to fill a position tasked at keeping more than 1 million Long Islanders safe.

Toulon's career of service prepared him for this moment, with more than 30 years of criminal justice experience. With the intimate knowledge of the needs of the Suffolk County Sheriff's Office after serving 25 years with New York City Department of Corrections, 22 of which were spent as a corrections officer captain, and his final three he was appointed the deputy commissioner of operations, Toulon was now the leader of 840 corrections officers, 240 deputies, and 130 civilian employees, across two detention facilities.

Now, after three years at the post, his mission remains the same as it was on day one: reduce recidivism, do so with fiscal responsibility and use state-of-the-art methodology to reduce crime in Suffolk neighborhoods.

"The first thing I did when I took office was that I wanted to ensure the public's trust and faith in the Sheriff's Office," said Toulon. "I was in one or two schools a week, talking about the issues that face our children and also at community centers and civic groups, so people could learn more about the Sheriff's office."

Sheriff Toulon is also historic, in his own right, becoming the first African American to be elected to a non-judicial countywide office, and the first African American to be elected Sheriff.

"It is an honor and privilege to be a first in anything -- I just hope that when people look back at my tenure at the post, I am remembered as one of the best Sheriffs that Suffolk County has ever had, because I was able to keep residents safe and help reduce crime. Not remembered for the color of my skin," Toulon continued.

As we know, his jurisdiction includes our lovely East End and the Hamptons, which remains one of the safest neighborhoods to live in America, due to his leadership, but also his unique understanding of matters pertaining to homeland security. In addition to his career in corrections, he was educated at the John F. Kennedy School at Harvard University, has a certification from the United States Department of Homeland Security

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for Emergency Planning, with a special focus on preparedness against threats from weapons of mass destruction or radiological incidents.

On September 11, 2001, he was assigned to New York's Firearms and Tactics Unit, and was a responder in the wake of that dark day. He was sent to Ground Zero because of his certification as an emergency medical technician, but because of his specialty in firearms, he was diverted, tasked with helping to secure the perimeter of the city against any pending attack on ground.

Holding a countywide position requires visiting the various regions of the county. The entirety of the North Fork, the South Fork, and everywhere westbound to the county line falls beneath his purview. He says that he enjoys spending time in our quaint neighborhoods on the East End with his wife, with Southampton and Montauk being two of his favorite areas to visit.

"We love finding new restaurants, going for walks. It's a great place to forget about the week's events, relax, and enjoy the scenery," said the sheriff. "I enjoy the stores, many of them being small businesses, which is unique to the East End and different from Western Suffolk."

He takes pride in the job and wearing the uniform. Along with pride, though, is an innate sense of duty to

the people who elected him. He says that, in order to curb crime, you need to embrace the youth and provide services to guide them throughout their upbringing.

This is why he began the Sandy Hook Promise School Safety Initiative, a forefront program which has trained 22,000 Suffolk youth on the warning signs of a peer in distress. His emphasis, in a 21st-Century way, is on social media, which can often give unique insight into the intentions and plans of a youth who seeks to do harm.

"I think to get to the root cause of any criminal behavior, starts with the adverse childhood experiences and working with the Sandy Hook Promise Foundation, we are hoping to break down the barriers, where a child can go to a trusted adult to deal with a problem or issue," said Toulon. "Any time that I can engage with the youth in Suffolk County is a tremendous experience. You hear their voices, their minds filled with ideas, sometimes unfiltered, which is something that I appreciate."

Sheriff Toulon has been honored and recognized in Washington, D.C., by the Sandy Hook Promise Foundation at their annual Gala. He has been honored in places throughout New York City and Long Island by police and community organizations. Less than a month ago, he received recognition on *Good Morning America* as the "First Responder of the Week" for the second time during his tenure.

Toulon seeks re-election in 2021.