

Sheriff Koutoujian reflects on past year and looks to the future

Middlesex
County Sheriff
talks about
getting the
department
back in the right
direction

By PAUL FEELY

Middlesex County Sheriff Peter Koutoujian has finished his first year in office, following an appointment by Gov. Deval Patrick last January, but you won't find him at any anniversary parties marking the milestone.

Koutoujian, who was appointed following the resignation of the late Sheriff James DiPaola, has been almost too busy to notice a year has passed since he first addressed a department in distress.

"It went very fast," said Koutoujian, referring to his first 12 months on the job. "I love it."

The Middlesex Sheriff's Office, established in 1692, is one of the oldest law enforcement agencies in the United States. Entrusted with full law enforcement capabilities, the Middlesex Sheriff's Office provides care, custody and control of both sentenced inmates and pre-trial detainees.

These functions are carried out at the Middlesex House of Correction in Billerica and the Middlesex Jail in Cambridge. Additionally, the Middlesex Sheriff's Office operates the Sheriff's Office of Civil Process, the Cambridge and Lowell Community Counseling Centers and numerous community service and crime prevention programs.

The department serves the 54 cities and towns that make up Middlesex County, including the following Middlesex East communities:

Reading
Wakefield
Woburn
Winchester
Burlington
Stoneham
N. Reading
Wilmington
Tewksbury

"There's no such thing as a typical day, except for the crises," said Koutoujian. "It's a tremendously challenging

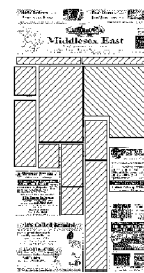
job. We have about 1,400 inmates, we have about 800 employees, many of whom are correction officers."

There are 800 men and women who perform the daily activities at the Middlesex Sheriff's Office. These officers are responsible for the well-being of the, on average, more than 1,400 individuals housed within the department's facilities.

Koutoujian took over as Sheriff following a difficult time for the department.

Former sheriff DiPaola ended his career amidst scandals in November 2010, when he allegedly attempted to exploit a loophole in his pension that would allow him to collect a pension and a salary simultaneously. He also faced allegations of improper financing for his campaigns. DiPaola committed suicide later that same November.

Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley closed an investigation into the Middlesex Sheriff's Office under DiPaola without any criminal charges.



Despite the controversy, Koutoujian said he didn't hesitate when it came to taking the job.

"In a nutshell, it was all about bringing the Middlesex Sheriff's Department, a department with a very long and proud history, back from a very difficult time," said Koutoujian. "It wasn't as difficult for me, because I knew what I was going into. I was excited for the opportunity. But for the rest of the department, some knew a lot about me, some knew a little about me, some had never heard of me at all. I think for some coming into a situation like that, there is the temptation to tear the department apart for political expediency. When it is unnecessary it is wrong. I knew the department was a good department, and we just needed to get back in the right direction."

Koutoujian's department has historical ties to the Middlesex East readership area.

According to information provided by the department, Major Loammi Baldwin, commander of three companies of Minutemen from the city of Woburn, executed the first and most costly ambush of the British "Redcoats" as the British began their 15-mile retreat all the way back to Boston.

The location of this skirmish on the Lincoln-Concord line is known as "the Bloody Angle" since it was there that the largest ratio of British to American casualties occurred that day. In addition, eight out of 10 commanding officers of the British forward units were killed or wounded there by

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Baldwin and his men. In 1780, even before the Revolutionary War was over, Major Loammi Baldwin became the first democratically elected Middlesex Sheriff.

"This office has been historically intertwined with every major event in the forming of this nation," said Koutoujian. "It's a really interesting and amazing office."

After spending more than a decade on Beacon Hill representing the 10th Middlesex District, Koutoujian was appointed Middlesex Sheriff on January 14, 2011 by Governor Deval Patrick.

As a state representative, Koutoujian held several leadership positions, including Chairman of the Joint Committee on Financial Services, Chairman of the Joint Committee on Public Health and Chairman of the Commission to End Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities. He helped craft the statewide workplace smoking ban and legislation about new school nutrition guidelines. Koutoujian also led efforts for victims rights and suicide prevention.

A lawyer by trade, Koutoujian served as a Middlesex County prosecutor before being elected to the Massachusetts Legislature in 1996. He has worked as an adjunct professor of Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure and Legal Ethics at the Massachusetts School of Law in Andover, and taught a course on American Government at Bentley University in Waltham.

Koutoujian earned his Bachelor of Science Degree in

psychology from Bridgewater State University and earned his Juris Doctor from the New England School of Law. He also earned a Masters Degree in Public Affairs from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He is a lifelong resident of Waltham.

Upon taking office, Koutoujian set about repairing his department's image.

"We assembled a transition team," said Koutoujian. "We asked the state auditor, Suzanne Bump, to conduct an audit of the department. We took some very aggressive steps to ensure public safety."

One area that Koutoujian has made a priority is providing more opportunities for Middlesex county communities to achieve cost savings by using inmate work crews.

"We've undertaken significantly greater efforts providing work crews to area cities and towns," said Koutoujian. "These are the crews you see cleaning up parks, cleaning up roadsides, occasionally you'll see them involved in a painting project, or working to remove graffiti. These are work projects that can provide financial relief to these cities and towns, because if they went out to bid on these projects the cost could be significantly more."

The list below has the amount of money saved per Middlesex East town or city by using the Community Work Program's inmate labor for the calendar year 2011.

Reading: \$40,000
Wakefield: \$42,000
Woburn: \$27,000
Winchester: \$70,000
Burlington: \$40,000

Stoneham: \$40,000
N. Reading: \$0 (no jobs
done here)
Wilmington: \$52,000
Tewksbury: \$124,000

Total for these towns for
2011: \$435,000

Koutoujian also touted the
use that his department's
equipment has received by
Middlesex East communities
over the past year.

"We have a command center,
which is only used in a
crisis situation," said
Koutoujian. "You will see it in
a kidnapping or hostage situation,
or sometimes in a situation
where there is a lost person,
you will see it used as a
staging area for law enforcement
personnel. When Officer DiNapoli
was shot recently at Four Corners
in Woburn, it was used as a
command center and staging area.
This equipment is not something
you will see in parades."

Koutoujian also touted the
benefits of his department's
mobile ballistics training unit.

"It is an enclosed unit,
where officers fire off live
rounds into computer-generated
video scenarios. You are
able to make decisions in
many different scenarios. We
have been able to provide this
training for many area
departments."

Koutoujian said the training
came into play recently in
Reading, after a woman fired
a gun at a man from outside a
home, then began walking up
a Reading street with the gun
in her hand.

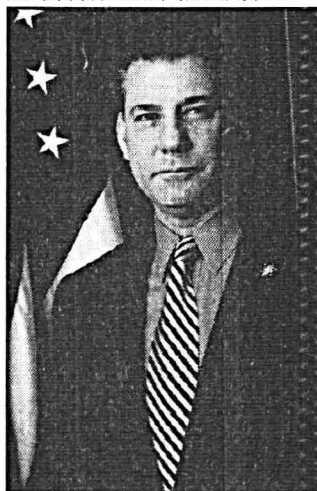
"Reading Police Chief Jim
Cormier told me that his officers
said it was straight out of
one of the scenarios they
worked through in our simulator,
and that the training

helped them handle the situation.
It's better training than they
could get at a firing range."

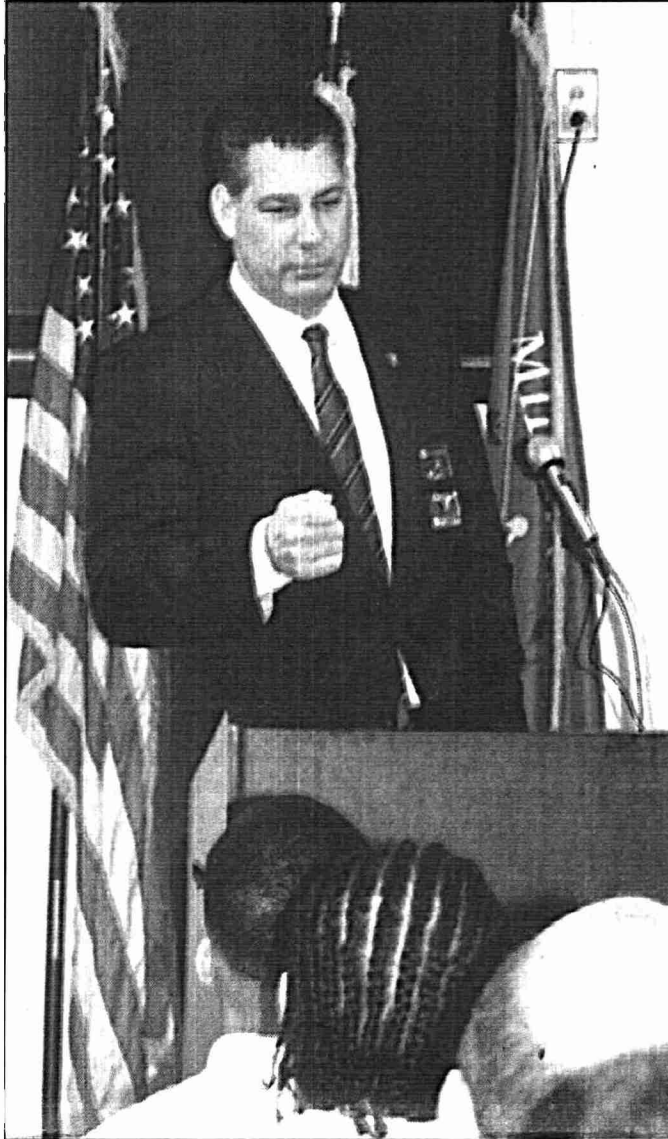
During this interview
Koutoujian also stated he will
be seeking re-election to the
job this fall, which was first
appointed in 1690 and in 1780
became an elected position.
He's looking forward to
launching several initiatives,
including an effort to prevent
teen violence, prescription
drug abuse and preventing
crimes against seniors.

"Make no mistake, I am
running for re-election," said
Koutoujian. "I want to continue
on with the work I have started
here."

Koutoujian is expected to
speak at Woburn Rotary next
Tuesday as part of the Youth
in Government exercisers.



MIDDLESEX COUNTY
SHERIFF PETER
KOUTOUJIAN





MIDDLESEX COUNTY SHERIFF PETER KOUTOUJIAN SPEAKS (left) at the 14th graduation of the Inmate Culinary Arts Program at the Billerica House of Correction. Also at the ceremony, nine inmates who recently earned their General Education Diploma were recognized for their dedication to their education. Koutoujian, who was appointed Sheriff last January, recently kicked off his election campaign for a six year term.