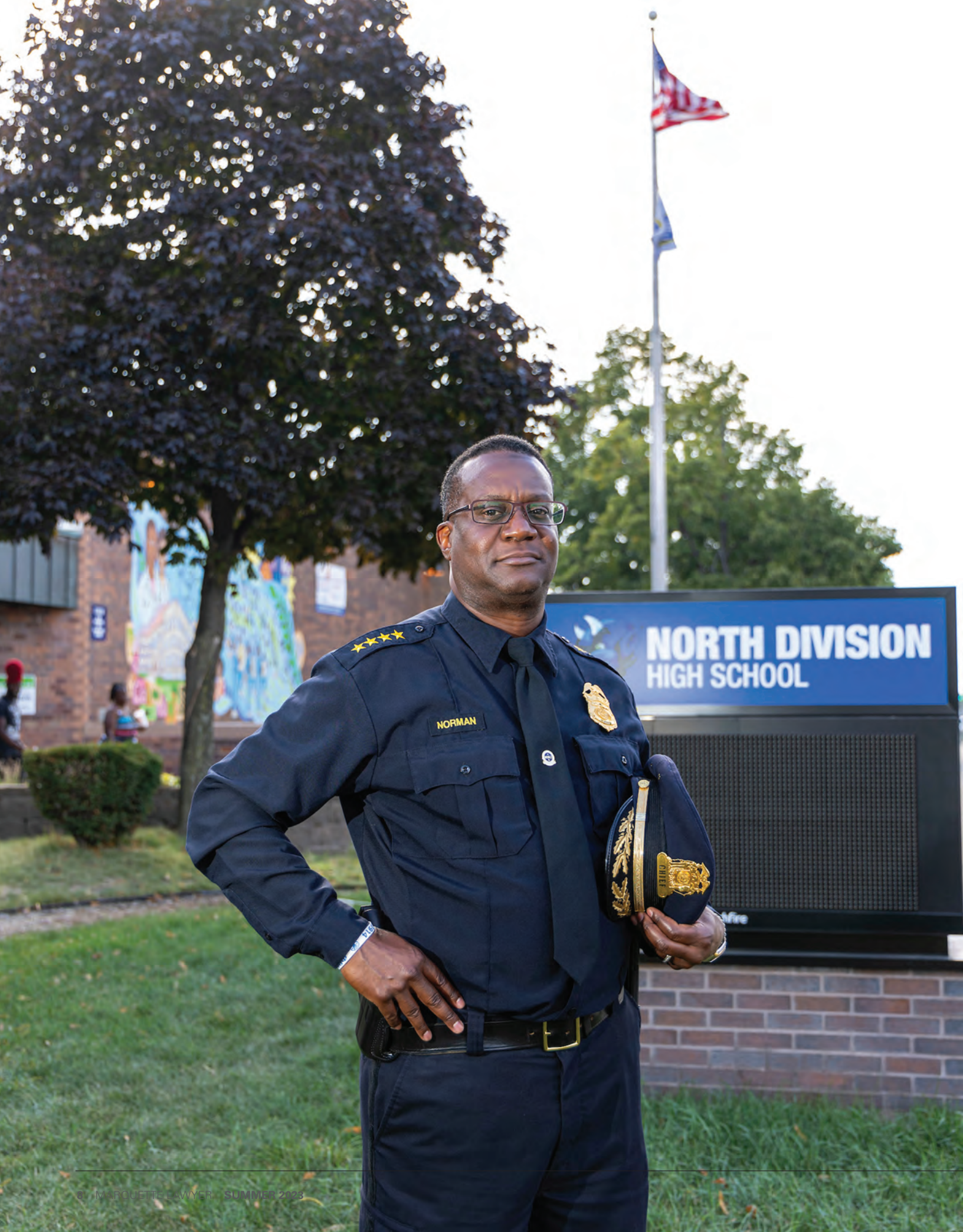
NORTH DIVISION
HIGH SCHOOL
NORMAN
CHIEF

CHIEF NORMAN WANTS YOUR TRUST

Jeffrey Norman, a Milwaukee native and Marquette lawyer, emphasizes collaboration and community partnership in his distinctive approach to his challenging job as Milwaukee Police Chief.

BY ALAN J. BORSUK

How different is Jeffrey Norman, L'02, from his predecessors as Milwaukee's police chief? A lot.

The way he answered a question during an *On the Issues* program in Marquette Law School's Eckstein Hall on June 1, 2023, underscored the difference. Derek Mosley, director of the Law School's Lubar Center for Public Policy Research and Civic Education, asked Norman what he would characterize as the police department's most pressing need.

More officers? Bigger budgets? You'd expect answers like those.

Norman's answer to the question? "I've said it time and time again," Norman said. "It's *trust*. . . . It's trust that we are doing the right things for the right reasons for you all."

Norman told the audience of about 200, "We have a different culture in the Milwaukee Police Department." It's a culture in which Norman wants the police and the community as a whole to join in efforts to improve Milwaukee and deal with problems, rather than having the police stand as a separate force, as has been the history of the department.

It's an ambitious undertaking, given the history—and in some cases still the reality—of relations between Milwaukee police and many city residents, especially in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods. Norman knows those places. They are the kind of places in which he grew up himself. He is a Milwaukeean through and through: North Division High School Class of 1992, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee Class of 1996, Milwaukee Police Department member for almost all the years since.

So who is Jeffrey Norman, and what are his aims for the complex and demanding job he undertook, first as acting chief in 2020 and then with the full title in 2021? Norman sat down with Alan J. Borsuk, senior fellow in law and public policy at Marquette Law School, for a conversation about his strategies and goals, as well as his personal story. This is an edited and condensed version of the interview.

"THE FOUNDATION SHOULD BE COLLABORATION"

In broad terms, how would you describe your philosophy of policing? So many approaches have come and gone nationwide over the years, such as policing ideas or slogans like "no broken windows." What's your own approach?

Collaboration. You hit the nail right on the head in regard to the ebbs and flows of strategies. One day, it's "no broken windows." Next day, it's "intelligence-led policing." The next day it's "SAR"—scan, assess, respond. Those are different blocks to build on. But they should not be the *foundation*. The foundation should be collaboration, which equals relationships.

There is always going to be some shortcoming—something that, as a police agency, you cannot provide. But what's needed can be enhanced or supported by others [outside the department] with expertise, whether it's government or business or community action or residents. And that's where I think we're really going to see the work of a police department grow exponentially.

I came up through a department that was very singular, very solo, not only from a standpoint of silos within the department, but also silos outside of the department. And that just was leading to futility. You're banging your head against the wall and expecting a different result.

You come up with a problem; the police department says we've got the solution. Come on, really? You know the Superman thinking—that there is no problem that we cannot solve. There was a lot of strain and a lot of frustration within the rank and file because there would be a leader saying this and then just giving it to the worker bees to get it done. We [police leadership] really did not truly appreciate all the other resources that could possibly be tapped into to have some true impact, sustainable impact.

So what did that look like? We'd go into a situation, and we'd do whatever we did—you know, probably ruffle a couple feathers, whatnot, and get a couple of people happy and a couple of people angry—and then we'd leave, and the problem is right back again.

So I would say that the true crime strategy of 21st-century policing is collaboration and relationships. And that builds trust. We have to understand this, especially in urban communities.

When you're dealing with a diverse population, being able to be respected, approachable, to have the level of communication with people that you need, it's a marathon. It's not a sprint. It's not a one-hit wonder, where you show up to a certain community event and you think you're all good. The work requires continuing nurturing, continuing planting, continuing growing. And it is something that is better to do with a team of people rather than thinking you're the only one doing that type of work.

But I see a lot of great things coming out of our collaborations. I see a lot of great things as a department, as a city. I believe that we will only truly be impactful as law enforcement across the nation by understanding the power in "we" and "us" and "team."

Trust *is a really important word to you.*

It is.

Expand on that. What does it mean?

Someone has a good idea of what is fair and just and says the police should run with it. I say, "How did we become the only ones able to put forth the effort and work of something that does have some value, some substance?"

But a lot of times, I don't think there is that level of trust from the community. Across a lot of our major metropolitan cities, we have a challenge in that we have trust in many parts of our community, some trust in others, and, in some parts, we have none. It is important for us to work on all three of those because, as an organization, we're information driven. As much as we might have the CSI stuff—a footprint here, a fingerprint there—overall success requires being able to work with residents, to work with stakeholders, to really get brain juices flowing, to get to true solutions.

The game changer in regard to us being truly effective is to continue to build trust, so that people look at us as partners or people who can truly be relied on, rather than as an occupying force or as someone just coming in to mess up things a little bit and leave. So that we're walking with each other.

I can see that we are turning a tide in many parts of our community. But there's so much trauma.

Long ago, I was a* Milwaukee Journal *reporter who covered Harold Breier, the police chief from 1964 to 1984. There were very few Black officers, and, for many years, none was assigned to the then predominantly white south side.

There are a lot of different opinions about that time. Within the Black and brown communities, there are a lot of very serious opinions about that. But I would say that it is important for us to own it. And to understand that we need to continue to be intentional about building from that. But we also

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need to understand that, as easy as or as hard as it is to gain, trust is easy to lose. So for me, I'm always on a building-trust pathway to ensure that I have the model for the organization I believe in.

We're a little more than three years past the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. The streets in Milwaukee and just about everywhere else in the country were filled then with people who were really angry at the police.

Yes.

What's the state of trust or community relations in Milwaukee now?

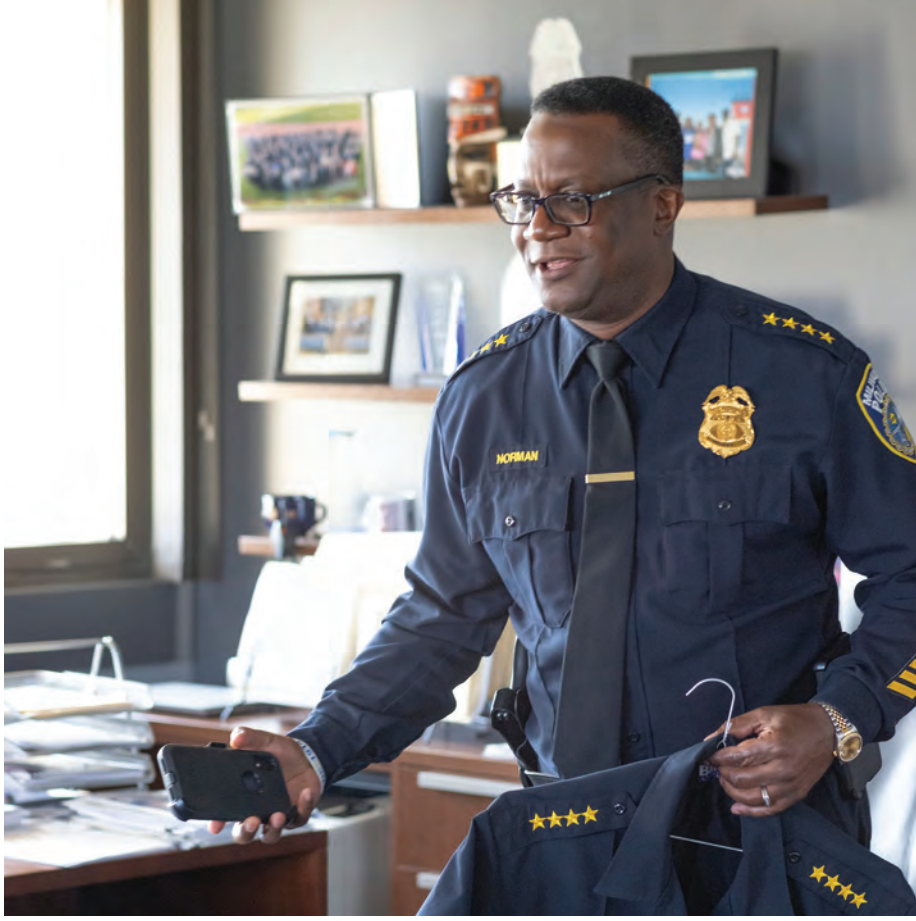
I'm not going to name-drop, but there are some people who were at one point on the front lines, yelling and screaming at the police, and now I'm at events where they are Facebooking live, holding their arms around my shoulders. If that doesn't say something about where we're at now since that horrible moment . . . . We are in a better place than where we used to be. But we still have work to do. I believe that we have a lot of trust and respect in a lot of corners that we didn't have before. But we all know it's still a very fine line. We always—unfortunately, after one mistake, one mess up—can lose that. And that's why it's so important for us to continue to build bridges and to nurture and continue that.

And it's not just my role, it's the role of everyone in the department. Everyone's role is to engage our community, to build sustainable neighborhoods. You know, it's not just the role of the person facing that press conference. It's the frontline officer, the frontline supervisor, the shift commanders, I'd even say the non-sworn side of the department. We're all team members. You know, it is important for us to all embrace that. And if you do not feel that way, well, then there are a lot of other opportunities out there in this grand old world that will be more than willing to take you.

A CHILDHOOD OF FRIENDS, FUN—AND BUMPER RAILS

You grew up near North 6th Street and Capitol Drive. What sticks out from your childhood years?

We were close. We were over at each other's homes during my adolescent and teen years. Summertime was always filled with some outdoor sports games, whether basketball, football, boxing, playing over at each other's homes, sharing meals. It was a truly memorable moment when a kid could be a kid.



But we still had rules. Pop didn't want us riding our bikes off the block. You could do the old circle [around the block], you could visit friends on the block, but there was what we could call bumper rails. When the lights went on, you were expected to be home. This assured that anyone we were hanging around with got the approval of the household. It was definitely not a free-for-all. You could be a kid, to a point. I can say I definitely have fond memories of that.

[Norman went to two Milwaukee public elementary schools. Then, using Wisconsin's program allowing enrollment in public schools in other districts, his parents sent him to two schools in Wauwatosa, a municipality just west of the city. His parents divorced during his middle school years, and his father wanted his son in a Milwaukee high school. Norman enrolled in North Division High School.]

There weren't a lot of success stories coming out of North Division.

That's correct.

What made you more successful?

You had kids walking the hallways; you had fights. But for me, that was partly an opportunity. I developed close relationships with some teachers because I was a student who wanted to learn. Not to say I was the only student, but I felt like it. With regard to engagement with an instructor, there was a lot of personal attention. They were appreciative that I was engaged.

I was at the library every day. By the time I graduated, the librarian had counted up how many books I had read. Over the course of maybe three years, I had read over 1,500 books. It was definitely a connected relationship with the administration and the instructors. There were definitely a lot of great memories about my experience at North Division. I wouldn't change it for the world.

My parents were determined that I was going to go to college. My father was like, "You're smart; you're going to college." My father had challenges in regard to education; my mother had challenges in regard to education. But they had expectations for me.

How might more North Division students, either then or now, become engaged with school life? How would you complete this sentence: "If I were principal of North Division, I would . . ."?

Do as much as I can to acknowledge the students and see them. I think a lot of kids are invisible because of certain behaviors. . . . It was easy for teachers to gravitate toward me because I was receptive and engaged. Sometimes, especially when you deal with so many kids who give you challenges, it is appealing to go off into a corner. But I saw so much untapped talent. . . . As a student, as a peer, you see them, and they show a little bit more vulnerability. In front of adults, they'll put up a shell.

Among kids now, I see so much hope and potential. The kids are hungry—man, they want to believe, they want to have something to grab on to and to say, "Life has to be better than this."

So if you were asked to give the commencement address at North Division High School, what would you tell the students now?

For anyone to believe in you, you need to believe in yourself. For anyone to love you, you need to love yourself. You need to understand that you have purpose, that you have the ability to accomplish what you put your mind to, but it starts with you.

LEARNING THE VALUE OF MENTORS

[One big asset for Norman has been his willingness to benefit from the mentoring and help of others. That was true in high school, in his early years in the Milwaukee Police Department, and while he was a student at Marquette Law School. He gives a prime example from his time at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee when he was helped particularly by Stan Stojkovic, a professor of criminal justice and criminology in the Helen Bader School of Social Work at UWM and a nationally known expert in his field.]

College was hard. I was the first child in my family to go to college, so I didn't have a pathway for what was expected. One of the things I messed up on was thinking that just because I'm intelligent, that was all it takes. You have to put your nose to the grindstone.

I was on an academic scholarship from the Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce. I learned the hard way—about my flippant thinking that this was going to be a cakewalk. I partied that first semester. Seeing the grades I received that first semester, I said to myself, "I'm going to lose my scholarship." Scared the crap out of me. So I learned the hard way what it takes to succeed.

But I really started to enjoy my college experience. I joined a fraternity. And I was an acolyte of Stan Stojkovic. At that time, he was a dean. He was my instructor once I got into the criminal justice program, and we've been friends ever since. That guy has been by my side my entire police journey. I'd show up for his office hours. Professor Stojkovic would say, "Why are you here? You got an *A* on the exam." But I would say, "I can do better." He was a great instructor, very engaging.

CHOOSING A POLICE CAREER: "IT JUST SPOKE TO ME"

You told me once that when you were a kid and you and your friends played cops and robbers, you always wanted to be one of the cops.

That's true.

What appealed to you about that side of the equation?

Two things. I've always loved doing community work. But also, there's a part where you like law and order. It just spoke to me. It's almost like telling somebody, "Why do you like chicken?" I just like chicken. The profession is something that just speaks to me.

When we played cops and robbers, I played the cop. I'm the first generation, the only individual in my family, who got into law enforcement. It's not like I come from a long history of "my grandfather was, my great-great grandfather was . . . ." It was just appealing to me because it's active. I didn't want to do the social worker thing, but I still wanted to help those in need—but also to hold people accountable who are doing wrong. All these different aspects of the particular profession spoke to me.

I was good in math, I did well in accounting. "Oh, you should become an accountant," some said. I was like, "I don't want to be an accountant." Granted, I could do the work because I know how to study and put my nose to the grindstone. But it's not enough just to be good at something. Or not enough to say, "It's a very cool job, and you make a lot of money." I see a lot of people I know who are just miserable. They have all the money in the world and all the things that they can acquire, but they don't really have substance or a feeling of accomplishment. I tell kids all the time, "Do what speaks to you. Align your career or what your aspirations are to what is your core. You've got to really align yourself with your north star." This is my north star.

LEARNING FROM THE COMMUNITY

My final semester at UWM, I actually was already in the police academy. I thank Dean Stojkovic; he allowed me to do some independent studies so I wouldn't be overwhelmed because, as we all know, the police academy is full-time, 8 to 4, Monday through Friday. So I was able to transition with my last semester. . . .

I was 22 coming into the academy. At 22, you still have a lot to learn about the world. Even though I had the book smarts and I had some street smarts and I had the athletic smarts, I didn't have the worldly smarts—just life and experience, especially dealing with people from all walks of life, all ages. So that was a big learning curve at that point.

When I started working on the streets, I loved it. I just ate it up. I had two phenomenal field training officers. I worked every hour, every minute. I was single. I had no family.

Did you consider anything other than the Milwaukee Police Department?

Actually, I had applied to a bunch of different departments, and I was in line to be hired by some of the small suburban departments. But I thought to myself: One, I'm born and raised in Milwaukee. Two, the opportunities are endless. And three, to move up in a small department, either somebody has to retire or quit. There's more opportunity in a big department.

Early on, you served on the south side. You learned about some of Milwaukee that, growing up on the north side, you didn't know much about.

Yes.

What did you learn?

There was a lot of diversity in regard to the culture and the food. As a 22-year-old, I learned from the engagements that I had with people and the community. When I was growing up, the only time we went to the south side was to 16th and National where we had our family dentist. You know, going to the south side was truly eye opening for me. I love to learn. It was a great experience.

But there were also some of the darker sides of society that I was exposed to on the south side. There were times when I was disappointed about some of our interactions as human beings. I remember that once I was assigned to a squad with another African American officer, and we responded to a call for service. A Caucasian male came to the door and said, "I don't want Black officers at my door." He said, "I don't need your help." And we told him, "Well, if you want police help, this is it. If not, then this is it." He said he'd rather handle whatever he wanted without our involvement. This is in the 1990s, man. We ain't talking about the '50s or '60s or '40s. This was the '90s. These types of experiences—it just kind of disappoints you.

But you have to find ways to rise above that and look at it from the standpoint that you can only control your own behavior. You cannot control all those you know. We were respectful. But, again, disappointed because it's just like, "Come on. You know you need help. You're really going to be worried about our gender, race, or creed?"

What does the diversity of Milwaukee mean to the way law enforcement works now?

Well, first, being a service-oriented organization, we're here to serve. Diversity to an organization such as ours is something to reflect, to understand, to engage, to lean into. It's important that we have all walks of life within our organization to give the best and most efficient, effective service to those whom we serve.

You have to aim to make the final product the best service to any particular group, organization, neighborhood, stakeholder. Diversity offers a lot of opportunity. I think it keeps life interesting. If we're all one make and model, it gets a little bit boring.

But there are challenges. We have ongoing engagement with all parts of the community, and there is an ongoing life-learning process. We should be embracing that. Too often, I think, especially in regard to our particular profession, we think too often that we've always been doing things this way or we've been there, done that. As a department that is service oriented, we should be always improving.

"For anyone to believe in you, you need to believe in yourself. For anyone to love you, you need to love yourself. You need to understand that you have purpose, that you have the ability to accomplish what you put your mind to, but it starts with you."

ENROLLING AT MARQUETTE LAW SCHOOL

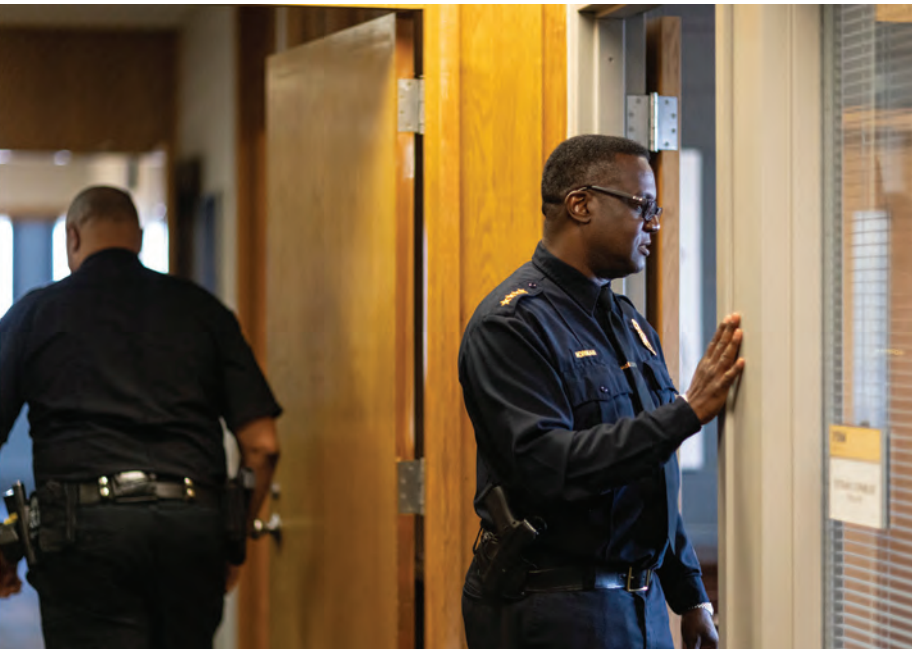
You had been a police officer for several years when you decided to go to law school. What prompted that decision?

The real reason? Frustration. I had a couple of challenging things on the job. I said, I'm going to change my career. It's funny. I was a young guy and, you know, you encounter "Get your stamps in a book, son" type of behavior that suggests you should be seen but not heard. It kills some of your spirit when you have aspirations. I had a bad experience with a colleague. I was allowing bad experiences to dictate my future.

So I decided I'm going to get my law degree and become a corporate lawyer. But that was just a pie-in-the-sky idea of mine. It was all about wanting prestige and money by doing acquisitions or contracts. I had no *desire* to do that.

As I was going through that, I was thinking, "What else would speak to me that was still aligned with me being in law enforcement?" So I wanted to get into the prosecutor's office. So that was behind my desire to change careers. I would say this: Going to law school part-time while working full-time as a cop—I wouldn't put anybody through that experience. That was one of the most challenging parts of my life.

One of the people I remember who was extremely effective and made law school palatable was Jane Casper [now retired assistant dean for students]. She was, oh, my goodness, a wonderful person. Truly a resource. If anyone was the mother of Marquette Law School, it was Jane Casper. I am so blessed and thankful not only that I acquired my law degree but that I attended Marquette. Marquette had a part-time program that was really, truly designed for individuals such as me. That really drew me, and I'm so thankful for that.



So law school worked out for you?

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I tell people, when you learn the law, you learn a different language. The law touches every aspect, every profession. It touches virtually everything. Having that degree has been extremely helpful. I'm big here [in the police department] when it comes to looking at contracts and looking at documents, and also thinking in a risk-management mindset.

You have kept your law license current, although you're not practicing now. Is it helpful to you to this day to have a law degree?

Absolutely. Hands down. Especially as you rise in the ranks and deal with a department our size and all the things that we have to interact with. Absolutely.

A YEAR AS A PROSECUTOR

You worked as an assistant district attorney for a year. Was that a good experience?

Excellent experience. And I worked for a very honorable, respected man. [Longtime District Attorney] E. Michael McCann was everything that people saw him to be. What sold me was that when I was interviewed, he said, "You're the prosecutor. You make the decisions. I trust that you will do right in regard to that particular power." I was like, "My man."

I got my litigation teeth, jury trials, bench trials, motion hearings. I got a chance also to see another side of the law being practiced, seeing how police did the first part, but seeing really what "beyond a reasonable doubt" means.

Relationships that were built back then are still nurtured to this day. It was wonderful. I was feeling good about my experience in the DA's office. But I wasn't feeling fulfilled. I went back to the police department.

You never got back to the idea of becoming a corporate lawyer.

Ha. That was a hoop dream. . . . A lot of that was emotion, and not thinking it through, and not being in alignment with your core, your north star. That was a lot of frustration.

THE CRISIS OF BAD DRIVING

If I talk to my neighbors and ask what's the biggest problem at the moment—

Can I fill it in? Reckless driving.

The answer is reckless driving. Absolutely. I tell people I am more afraid of crossing the street than I am of someone breaking into my house. Are we making progress on this?

I would say from a statistical standpoint, yes. From a perception standpoint, no. There are tangible things being done that help—more roundabouts, narrowing streets.

Those weird concrete block things that stick out from the curb.

Yeah. Weird block things. So that's a traffic-calming method, that's an engineering thing.

I'm wondering if they're going to work.

They're called curb extensions, and they stop people from doing what we call baselining or driving to the right around you. It narrows the street so they can't go anywhere. Now, have some people driven into them? I'll say this: that car has now been taken out of the context of being in the hands of a reckless driver. I mean, it's sad that you have to see those examples sometimes.

There is no foolproof strategy. As a department, are we better than what we used to be? From a statistical standpoint, I say yes. Now, do we still have a lot of work to do? Absolutely—because you still have people who are running red lights.

And we have enforcement successes. I mean, more than 300 cars towed. We're going after people who are not responsible with a vehicle, and we are taking their vehicles away. And many of them, unfortunately, they're not going to get them back because you've got to either produce your insurance or do other things to get it back. Our traffic enforcement is robust; our crashes are down. Costs from reckless driving are down.

But I'll never tell someone, especially you as a resident, that what you see or what you believe is not your reality or the truth, because unfortunately, you do still see examples out there. I see it as well as anybody else.

Why do people drive like that, kids especially?

Oh, my goodness. You make me feel like I'm some type of guru. Like I sit on a mountain. I would say because they don't care. Selfishness. There is a lack of the respect for what we expect out of each other. A lot of things that social media did to us have taken away a lot of our societal mores. You just say what you want to say. The things that we're seeing that people are doing now [on social media], people are idolizing it. . . . That's reflected sometimes in behaviors in workplaces, it is reflected on our streets.

There is no one group who is really responsible for reckless driving. It can range from grandparents to people who never had a license. How do I know? Because I've stopped them. I've seen delivery drivers do illegal turns and drive at high-risk speed, people who work for the post office. It's mind boggling. But we did not get to this overnight. You know what it was? You worked in the media. What was media reporting like back when you were starting out in the 1970s? What was television like? There were certain things you couldn't say. Now it's almost like anything goes. So we're surprised? There was a sinister, gradual decline of behaviors, starting with idolizing selfishness. And now it's come to fruition. And I believe that [the pandemic in] 2020 sped it along. The mental anguish and everything else really let the floodgates go.

KIDS, GUNS, AND VIOLENCE

As we're sitting here, in the last 48 hours, there have been four kids shot in the city, two of them fatally. What's going on out there, especially with kids?

So I'm no guru and I wish I could have all the answers. We have a mixture of challenges. For one, during the COVID pandemic, everyone wasn't blessed to be like my family where my kids were still able to be engaged in activities. Many of the city's kids were left to their own devices. We underestimated the impact on mental health and the trauma.

In addition, the chickens have come home to roost in regard to the accessibility of social media with a lot of the harmful images. You see that playing out now in the streets. The arguments, they're just turning very violent very quickly. You mix that with the reality that we have a lot of firearms in our community—and this is not an NRA [National Rifle Association] thing, I don't want to go down the road about constitutionality. I'm talking about having more responsible gun ownership. Children who are in possession of firearms, especially handguns, got them illegally. They didn't go to Cabela's; they didn't go to Dunham's.

So you are dealing with a situation of a perfect storm. Guns being taken out of vehicles, guns left unattended in homes, or guns that were in possession of an adult but just left in front of kids. So that is one angle.

"I tell people, when you learn the law, you learn a different language. The law touches every aspect, every profession. It touches virtually everything. Having that degree has been extremely helpful."

We're seeing more accidental shootings. We're seeing negligence. But also, we see kids where we talk about the mental anguish, trauma, utilizing these weapons of destruction to settle scores.

The number-one known motive for our shootings and homicides is "argument/conflict," meaning that there was some sort of conflict that was resolved with a firearm. There is nothing new about kids fighting. What is new is that they are using without any particular hesitation—we all know the impulsiveness of children—weapons of destruction that change not only the lives of those they shoot, but their own.

So we have a lot of different issues at hand. Go back to our violent crime plan. We understand there are different levels in a comprehensive approach. One, there should be a lot of work on prevention. There should be a lot of work in education. Locking up the weapons—you know, there are gun locks provided through so many different organizations. Responsible gun ownership. Don't leave your weapons unattended in vehicles.

But part of this is that there needs to be accountability. We cannot allow those behaviors to go unaddressed. There is accountability for parents and their kids who are engaging in behaviors beyond the curfew or carrying weapons.

We are being thoughtful in how we approach this. It's not as easy as some people say to just lock them all up. One, we don't have the capacity. Two, that's not a very good use of the community resources. Three, we're not being innovative or imaginative in looking at what are root causes.

The Milwaukee Police Department is part of so many initiatives. We try to look at root causes—poverty or homelessness or education. There are collaborative approaches with the state Department of Health and Human Services, the district attorney's office, the Milwaukee Fire Department, the city's Office of Violence Prevention, and more. There are so many opportunities out there, and we really need to be part of the discussion.

These issues with our young ones didn't happen overnight. And I know that there is the urgency coming from the public. There is urgency on my part. But we need to be able to use all our resources and engage so many more than just law enforcement and our elected officials.

[Norman described an event hosted by Bader Philanthropies, Inc., where youths who spoke emphasized that they wanted mentors and adults who will be positive forces in their lives.]

I used to mentor before I became a father. I understood that there is a balancing act of seeing kids through some of these crises and emergencies. But now that I have children, I've got to be their mentor first until they have graduated college.

If all of us just took our responsibility on, that would help. It's good that people say, "I donate to this" or "I donate to that." Donate your time. Donate your experience and wisdom. Be the change.

THE POLICE AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

A few years ago, when Ed Flynn was the chief, he spoke at the Law School. One of his themes was: Somebody's got a mental crisis, somebody's got a drug crisis, somebody's got a domestic crisis? "Call the cops," seems to be the constant answer. Everybody calls cops for everything, he said. The police are asked to do too much. Let's start with mental health. Are the police being asked to do too much?

Those words are famous because they still hold true today. But sometimes we [police leaders] aren't totally honest in that conversation. We took on too much. We did not tell the truth. We, the police, were part of creating that superhuman, super-strength persona that allowed this to become a monster that is too unwieldy.

Yes, there are a lot of mental health issues in our community. Again, I can only talk anecdotally. I know that there are some great efforts, but some of them are being overwhelmed. I don't feel that we don't have enough resources. I feel that we don't have a lot of collaboration with those resources—that there are silos and that there are best practices that we could still capitalize on.

I'd really love to see law enforcement get out of the business of dealing with some of our societal ills when a different approach is more warranted. The unfortunate thing is this conundrum of, "yeah, we should take it away from the police," but then it comes back to "who's going to do it?"

We're the only organization, besides our medical field partners or fire department partners, that is on duty 24/7, 365 days a year, holidays included. And that is where the challenge comes in. We have a lot of good-idea fairies in the world, but that falls short of being a solution, because even when we tried to expand what we were doing, we had a challenge of finding therapists to go with the officers on the later evenings. We're not talking about overnight. I'm talking about later

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evenings. Because some of us in the world think that the work that we do, especially with societal ills, is "Monday through Friday, weekends off, and don't talk to me about holidays." Unfortunately, the challenges that we deal with, for which many of us as officers have sacrificed being at home (I worked 19 years late shift), are that we understand that this is the responsibility of us for being part of this profession.

DRUG ABUSE, A COMPLICATED CONUNDRUM

Drugs. What's the police role in dealing with this?

It is so complicated. From the enforcement aspect of it, it means holding people accountable for those who are in the business of dispensing illegal drugs or even legal drugs illegally, disrupting those particular types of businesses. But, unfortunately, we're asked to do so much. Now we're carrying Narcan. We're seeing so many, I would say, strategies being used, but the fentanyl that is being dispensed in our community kills—and it's pretty good at it.

And so you're just kind of thinking to yourself like, "What is going on? Is there something deeper than what we're seeing with the dispensing of drugs?" Drugs have unfortunate attachments to some things that are difficult to track, such as bitcoin. The dealers are being very savvy with regard to the financial aspect of it.

I know that we have a great relationship with other law enforcement. We all know drugs come across borders beyond not just states, but also countries. Our collaboration as law enforcement agencies helps us be just as or even more savvy than those who are not only trafficking but dispensing.

But there is a part where we have to deal with, again, underlying causes. What happened in 2020 did a real job on us. People now use drugs even more to deal with their anxiety, deal with mental health. So it's almost interconnected to depression.

We still do drug enforcement. But the violence in the community is very consuming. Drug violence, that's some of it. Our biggest issue from an enforcement aspect is the "argument/conflict" violence, which is very hard to wrap your head around. That becomes a little bit consuming when it comes to drug enforcement because you use a lot of resources dealing with firearms. When you have a homicide or nonfatal shooting, that is a resource drain.

There's still a lot of enforcement going on. We have things that we are working on, collaborating to disrupt the drug trafficking organizations and those who are flooding our respective communities. But it's a juggling act in regard to the different priorities that you have to put forth as an organization, especially with the finite resources that you have.

BEING THE CHIEF

The four stars on your shoulders and the stripes on your sleeves—were they a goal from early on? Did you think you'd be the chief?

Yes. I knew I was going to be chief somewhere. My goal was to be chief here, but I knew I was going to be chief somewhere. Some people think, "Oh, you fell into it." I say, "Check my résumé; look at the courses I've taken." At a time when I was a lieutenant, at the time I was a captain, taking courses to hone my skills and to know what's expected. It led up to this particular point—being an individual coming into the position, eyes wide open, rather than, "Oh, I didn't expect this."

I am not afraid. I ask questions. I talk to people who've been there, done that, to find out, "What were the things that you liked?" or "What should I do?" If you are really into your profession or you're really into your work, you should be able to talk about the skill sets, knowledge, and abilities you need until the sun comes up. So I did a lot of research and did a lot of classes, just to ensure that I got all the experience I could possibly get before being in the top spot.

So you like the job?

I love the job. Absolutely. And when I stop loving it, I will be gone. When this is not a labor of love any more, Jeffrey Norman can exit, stage left.

One of the things you said in the program at the Law School this past June was that people shouldn't hold against you some of the things your predecessors did and that it's a different department now. What's the difference between you and some of your predecessors?

Well, I can't put my finger on anything that I can say is different between myself and my predecessors. But I know who I am, and I know what I bring to the table. And I know that it is important to be able to have not only the book smarts but also the community smarts. It is important to have the history of being engaged in all parts of the community.

I hope people see me as a genuine servant leader. That it is not about me. I understand my role as the face of the department. But the work

that is really being done is by a lot of people who are more intelligent and who are more expert at some subjects than I am.

I eat this for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Sometimes I work seven days a week, sometimes I can put in a good 12 or 14 hours a day. It does come with challenges. And I do have a wife and kids, so I pull them into a lot of my engagement.

I can talk about the technical sides of this work or the budget and finances. I have a master's in public administration, so those things are not a fear to me. One of the things really important to me is to treat this department like a Fortune 500 company. You know, with the budget that we are responsible for, we should be responsible fiduciary agents of the public's trust and money.

But, overall, I'm a people person. I hope when people look at me they see that they get the best of both worlds. You get the guy who can talk about stats and look at a crime plan, working on micro areas, pinpointing particular locations of incidents. But there is more to our job than just a dot or number. When I look at the dots, I see residents, I see faith-based institutions, I see businesses. So you get the best of both worlds in one package.

"I am understanding of the responsibility of our service. But there are also a lot of other challenges. Why are you talking to me about them? Law enforcement is our wheelhouse. When we start doing other things, it's like, I love that passion, but somebody else deserves that. And it seems that, in my own perception, other entities get passes."

MORALE AMONG THE RANK AND FILE

How would you assess the morale of the department at this point? Police, by definition, every day see the worst of what's going on around here. And it wears on people sometimes.

We do climate surveys, and we have engaged with what we call the influencers. So we talk to individuals who are in formal and informal positions to get feedback. Do we have our challenges? Absolutely. There's a lot of feedback to us about what they like to see. But anecdotally I think that they [the officers as a whole] are okay. I'm not going to sit here and say they're extremely happy. But there have been a lot of takeaways that we were able to get from our rank and file, and we've put things into motion. We had an issue with our firearms [officers thought their guns were not safe to use], and I was able to address that as a team quite quickly—I mean, a turnaround of more than 1,600 firearms within a short amount of time. Then we had an incident in one of our stations [a man firing a gun]. It had been talked about before, to get bullet-resistant glass. Our team was able to get this done.

But every day, you've got to keep on working on this, showing that we're being attentive, that we're being responsive. I always say that we can do more. As much as we communicate, they always say the leadership style is communicate, communicate, communicate, and when you think you have communicated enough, you have to communicate some more.

Does the department have the resources to do its job?

I will say this: we work with what we have. We always could use more. But it's important to understand that we have to also prove that we are responsible with what we do have. I know that's a complicated answer to a short question. I know that we have done a lot of things to make ourselves more efficient, more effective.

We ask ourselves, "Do we always need officers to respond to a particular call for service [such as small thefts where reports are needed for insurance purposes]?" It's a win-win to handle those online or by people filing reports at district stations, where you don't have to wait for a squad to respond.

To leave aside a number of its other aspects, the new state budget included provisions strengthening the resources of the Milwaukee Police Department.

It is a blessing to be able to have more resources. But I do understand that it is a challenge in regard to dealing with a department our size or a budget our size. I've always said this: We will deal with whatever budget is bestowed upon us and work our best to deliver the services the public expects.

THE MILWAUKEE GUY

You are a lifetime Milwaukee guy. What do you like about Milwaukee?

What's there not to like? So I will tell you, first of all, what I love. It's funny, when my in-laws visit from California, they say it's so green. Our cost of living is reasonable. We have a wonderful city and a wonderful lake. It's a little nerdy, but I think a fresh body of water is a serious thing. Absolutely. There are so many things. I'm a theater guy; I love going to the Rep or the Next Act Theater. The food scene is wonderful, and there is so much diversity in our community. There are so many different cultures reflected in our festivals every year. The cost of living is reasonable, regarding the type of home you can own and the type of area where you can live.

I learned early as an officer to become a tourist in my own city. Especially when people ask like, "Where can you get this?" or "Where can you get that?" I will have to admit I have scaled back a little

bit because it's harder to be out there in public now than when I was just Joe Schmoe.

What would you change about Milwaukee?

People's attitude about our city. Sometimes you need to visit somewhere else to appreciate what you have. Our city has a lot to offer. There's a little bit of everything. Now, I'll say this, the weather is something else. We have a tendency to hold on to old urban legends or things that are not beneficial for a city that has so much potential.

There are certainly parts of the city, shall we say, where that theme doesn't resonate.

That's true.

Opportunity is not the same. Education attainment is not the same. The quality of life. Stability in housing. Food.

That's true. But my challenge is: show me a metropolitan city of our size or bigger that doesn't have those inequities. And that's not to say that it makes it okay. It says that this is something that we have to continue to look for in those who are talented enough to lead us out of those issues. How do we engage other resources to be able to deal with those issues? Courageous leadership is not a normal thing. Being able to understand how to activate other resources, there's a level of relationship-building humility that goes along with that.

It's not one particular administration's or person's responsibility to get us out of the mire. There's a lot of complicated reasons why those particular issues go on. And I will say that we as a public need to demand more—and demand more than just words, but also actions.

Demand more from government?

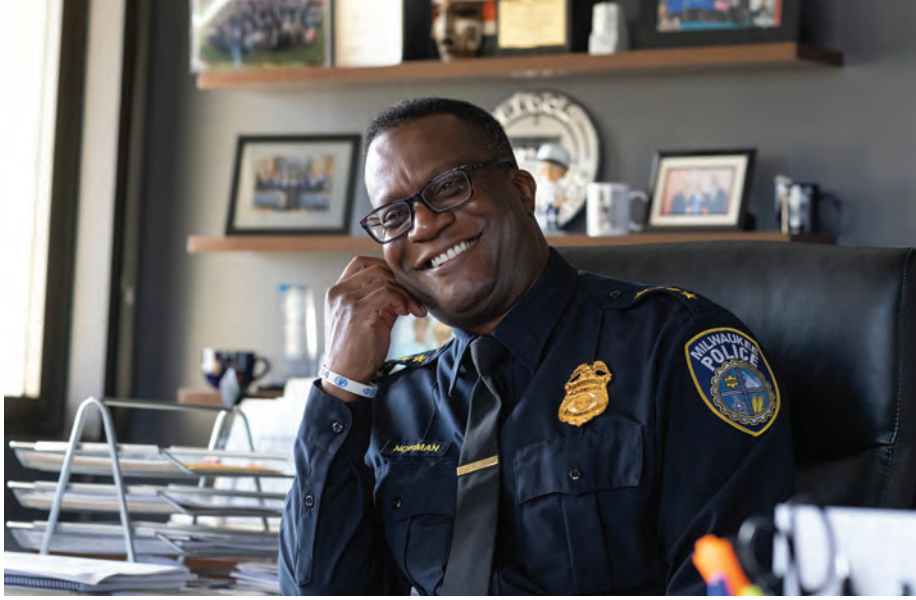
From all of us. If people had the energy, the engagement that they have in holding our [the police department's] feet to the fire, when it came to everyone else, you'd see a different world.

I am understanding of the responsibility of our service. But there are also a lot of other challenges. Why are you talking to me about them? Law enforcement is our wheelhouse. When we start doing other things, it's like, I love that passion, but somebody else deserves that. And it seems that, in my own perception, other entities get passes.

HARLEYS AND PELOTONS

Do you still ride your Harley?

I do love my Harley. Still ride my Harley. It is a wonderful pastime. Unfortunately, you have to have the time. When I do have time, the priority is between my children, my wife, traveling. [Norman's



wife is a physician affiliated with the Medical College of Wisconsin and Froedtert Hospital. The couple has two teenage children, "both smart as a whip," as he puts it.]

You know, there is a lot of sacrifice for this particular position that a lot of people don't even know or are aware of. It's not for me to ask for any sympathy or empathy, but working 14 hours a day or working 9 to 10 days straight, it's commonplace. And there is a part where, if you don't understand what this particular role expects of you and don't step up to that plate, it could eat you alive.

But I am blessed to have a wonderful family life. I do have a life outside of this profession and this organization. And it helps balance me. I work out every day—six days a week actually. I do have Sabbath on Sunday. And I also get in eight to nine hours of sleep daily, making sure that the rejuvenation is real.

What kind of workouts do you like to do?

Peloton. You get to pick your different instructions. It's wonderful. My wife actually bought it for herself, and I took it over.

"MEET US HALFWAY"

"Give us the benefit of the doubt," Norman said to the audience at the program on June 1 in the Law School's Lubar Center, as he described his approach to increasing safety in the city.

"It's a partnership," he said. "Our hand is out. Meet us halfway."

Norman literally extended his hand. He spoke with a passion that led Milwaukee County Sheriff Denita Ball, sitting next to him, to say, with a laugh, "All right, Rev."

Has anyone ever called a Milwaukee police chief "Rev" before, especially in public? Not likely. But has any Milwaukee police chief preached to the city like this before? Definitely not. Which leads to asking: Can Norman move enough people to say, "Amen"? ■