58 Years as a Kentucky State Employee: A Q&A with Mr. David Whitehouse

By Russell Goodwin

Public Service Recognition Week is a time when we celebrate and acknowledge the accomplishments and hard work public servants from across the country. Here in Kentucky, we had a conversation with the longest serving Executive branch employee of 58 years, Mr. David Whitehouse, Revenue Field Compliance Officer for the Dept. of Revenue. During a 15-min conversation, Mr. Whitehouse shares his beginnings in state government, proudest moments and words of wisdom to new state employees.

**Russell: What motivates you to serve in your current capacity?**

David: The ability to address criminal activity in the State of Kentucky. What interested me back in 1961 as a young man is what the State Police did and of course I went in during that point and time and did all kinds of enforcement into criminal activity. As things changed I went into special investigations, which went into more criminal activity, then revenue. Before that, well quite frankly, I went into narcotics and did a lot of the narcotics work along those lines and then I went into revenue as far as tax evasion and all of that. It kind of boils together when you say “criminal activity,” you know? It’s comprised of a lot of things.

**R: How did you get started in state government?**

D: Well, when I got out of high school, I played football and went to play for Texas A&M. I played down there for Bear Bryant for a year and then came home after that fall season and got married. So that dissolved the football situation {laughs}. And I then came on into the State Police.

**R: Are you a resident of Frankfort?**

 D: No, Lawrenceburg

**R: Can you speak to how your experience as a student athlete plays a role in your current capacity?**

D: Of course. Football is a team sport and, you know, you learn how to play with the team. And then when you get into, well for example state government, you get into a teamwork sort of situation and that applies about all the way through.

**R: What words of wisdom would you share with a new state employee?**

D: Well, if we’re talking about state employees, you need to stay engaged in state operations and whatever field you’re in as far as state government goes and you need to be engaged in that business and learn it and apply it as it needs to be applied.

**R: So basically, gaining a better understanding of the landscape that you’re in, having a better understanding of how the operations function and how decisions are being made from the top down?**

D: Exactly. And of course in state government you’ve got all kinds of different situations as far as operations and the way things are done and if you stay engaged in the situation as you move forward in another areas of state government, that’s always helpful.

**R: I’ve been in state government for about 3 months now and that’s good know. What are you most proud about throughout your career?**

D: I was the first to be award ‘Trooper of the Year’ in 1968 with KSP.

**R: What was that process like?**

D: Well each Post at that point and time, and I don’t know if they’ve changed it now - the way they do that selection - but the program is still going on, but back then each post designated a Trooper to be interviewed and go into headquarters and go through the interview process. Then all of the decisions were made at headquarters as who would be selected as “Trooper of the Year.” That’s how that first started out.

**R: Do you still have the plaque and memorabilia?**

D: Yeah, sure do. I’ve got the plaque and everything.

**R: You also mentioned that you organized and structuring the first CID division in Revenue. Tell me more about that experience.**

D: That’s the Criminal Investigation Division in Revenue. That was in 19...well, let me back up. In State Police when I came on, you had mandatory retirement. You had to sign papers that when you got 55 years old, you automatically had to retire and you agreed that you would and they called that “mandatory retirement.” Well, [laughs] I was one of the last people that came under that ruling in that situation until the federal people threw it all out about a year later, but anyway…I was contacted by the commissioner of Revenue in 94’ to set up a criminal division to address criminal activity and tax evasion and he wanted me to do it. So I came in and met him and that’s what we did.

**R: And that’s the division you currently serve in?**

D: Yes, that’s correct. And what I do now as an investigator… you know, I don’t want to be, at this point and time in my life, into a lot of the heavy duty management, and I know some young people don’t understand that, but I’ve already been through all that [laugh]. So that’s what I’m doing now, I just work criminal cases as applied to tax evasion and I go from there.

**R: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me.**

D: Good talking with you.