

Badge & Gun: March 2013

Brief Bio: Fletcher unafraid to take bold steps down life's road

BY TOM KENNEDY

After all, he began as an under-aged sheriff's deputy, an HPD rookie whose patrol car accident changed his life, a veteran officer whose elbow-rubbing with Drayton McLane and Ken Lay led to a security business and a civic activist who had to move across Spring Creek to run for the job of state representative of District 130.

Born in Brownwood, Fletcher grew up the son of the youngest chief deputy to ever serve in Bell County. Inspired to be a law enforcement officer the deputy's son found a job as a deputy sheriff in Palestine in Anderson County.

High Pay in Houston

Only 20 years old and working a 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. shift six days a week, Fletcher relied on the sheriff to purchase his first gun and a deputy friend to buy bullets when he needed them.

Single with very little opportunity for a social life, the young deputy was urged to accompany five or six of his fellow colleagues on a trip to Houston to apply to HPD.

"Why apply to Houston?" Fletcher asked the group.

"Because they pay more than anybody in the state," came the reply.

As it turned out, Fletcher was the only one in the group summoned for a follow-up interview. The problem was that the recruiters needed to talk to his boss, a factor which put the deputy, then 21, in a bad spot.

"I can't guarantee we're going to hire you," the recruiter said.

Fletcher took the plunge anyway.

The sheriff promised to get him more money but the still green deputy said money wasn't as important as his social aspirations, which had been severely hampered by the fact he had worked 13 of his days off in his first year on the job.

"In Houston I can work a 40-hour week," he said.

HPD hired him. He graduated Academy Class No. 78 in September 1977, the first class to experience field training officers. "Most cops are on probation for six months," he recalled. "We came out and were being trained and graded."

His Rookie of the Year honor while in Patrol wasn't the only significant event in his first year in the Bayou City. An on-duty car accident changed his life.

It happened during a rush hour on Memorial Drive. A young Jamaican woman new to Houston and not used to driving on the *right* side of the road, plunged into a crowded intersection, right into Fletcher's patrol car.

"If I had gunned it and gone by," Fletcher recalled with a winsome smile, "I would have missed the greatest thing in my life."

The woman was Penny Benn, a sixth-generation Jamaican. Her British grandfather was sent to the country to oversee coffee and bananas. His son married a woman from Scotland. "She (Penny) is lighter than I am," Fletcher said, "and looked like Olivia Newton-John, complete with the accent."

The young Patrol officer didn't know if he could resist her. He knew he had to see her in court, where she admitted she was wrong and took her medicine. He learned she attended school in London and had come to Houston to live with her sister and her young family.

The officer indicated that he might ask her out and said he needed her phone number.

HPD Career

"It's on my ticket," she said, and turned and walked away.

Their first date was the annual awards ceremony of the 100 Club of Greater Houston, where Penny watched her date receive the HPD Rookie of the Year award.

They married in April 1979 and now have two daughters, Amanda and Rebecca, a son, Blake, four granddaughters and a new grandson.

Fletcher took the promotional exam for detective in 1983 and was literally the last person to promote to detective before then-Police Chief Lee P. Brown eliminated the rank, making sergeants of all detectives.

The detective/sergeant worked a year in the Robbery Division before doing a year in Internal Affairs. "I then went back and stayed in Robbery throughout the 80s," he recalled. "Steve Jett was asked by Chief (Sam) Nuchia to head the public integrity group, later called PIRG, and Steve asked me to come with him."

PIRG later became the Office of Inspector General (OIG) or what Fletcher refers to as "the Magnificent 7."

"Everything was disproportionate," he said. "Internal Affairs had 114 detectives investigating less than 5,000 people in HPD, while we seven were over 25,000 city employees, elected officials and city contractors.

"That was not right - 114 versus seven."

Fletcher's duties and extra job resulted in getting to know Houston Astros owner Drayton McLane and Enron's chief executive Kenneth Lay before the Enron debacle unfurled.

These noteworthy executives convinced Fletcher that there was a great need for private security agencies in Houston. He retired in 1998 and opened a security business that called Enron, Dynegy and others his clients.

Fletcher's business was going strong until Enron went belly-up while still owing him \$1.5 million. The company, Resource Protection Management of Tomball, weathered the crisis and is run by Penny Fletcher when the Legislature is in session.

New Home, New Job

How the retired police officer, Allen Fletcher got into his current job is another story.

In the last election he got more votes than any other 24 state representatives in Harris County, a record Fletcher attributes to the activism of his conservative Republican constituency that is centered around Tomball.

Fletcher's business was also anchored in Tomball and he was an active leader in the Greater Tomball Chamber of Commerce, a Rotary Club member and determined crusader against franchise taxes at a time when the incumbent state representative wasn't crusading enough.

Leaders in District 130, which includes the school districts of Tomball, Cy-Fair, Katy, Klein and Waller, approached Fletcher about entering elective politics. There was just one problem – he didn't *live* in the district.

To become eligible to run for the seat, the candidate and his family would have to move from the only home they had ever known, a wooded six-acre countryside homestead.

"I went to my wife and told her that they just asked me to run for state rep and that we have to move," Fletcher recalled. "She said, 'If you want to do it, I'll live with you under a bridge.'"

The law says you have to be a district resident for one year, meaning the Fletchers had 10 days to find a new home across a creek less than a mile away.

When the incumbent portrayed the challenger as a "carpetbagger" in the nine debates before the primary election, Fletcher had a strong comeback:

"He said I had moved into the district to run against him. True. But my three children graduated from Tomball High School and I was a member of the Tomball Rotary and chairman of the Chamber of Commerce. I was not like a stranger."

Then came the capper: Fletcher's son Blake was an air assault gunner in the Iraqi War.

In the debates the candidate reminded the prospective voters that Blake grew up in the Piney Woods outside of Tomball and that it was difficult telling his son that he would be moving from the only home he'd ever known. "You won't be living there anymore," he said.

"I understand, Dad," said Blake Fletcher, now enrolled in the DPS Academy. "If I can cross the ocean to fight for our country, you can cross Spring Creek to run for state representative."

Fletcher won the debates and the election. During session, he is in Austin full-time representing the constituents of District 130.