

Iorio appoints Tampa's first woman, first openly lesbian police chief

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Special Report by Mike Wells for *Creative Loafing*

Tampa native Jane Castor humbly accepted an appointment today from Mayor Pam Iorio to become the city's next police chief.

The 6-foot, lanky mother of two will be the first woman to command the Tampa Police Department when she is sworn in on Oct. 1. She also is set to become the state's first openly lesbian police chief.

Though her appointment is historically significant to Tampa's LGBT community, Castor treated it as a non-issue when questioned.

The 49-year-old never dodged LGBT-related questions, but said she'd rather focus on what she plans to do as chief. Castor made it clear that she has never experienced homophobia on the part of other Tampa officers or the public.

"When I came on the department 25 years ago, the trails had already been blazed," Castor said. "I've never had any issues within this department or within this city."

However, her appointment is still a milestone, said Equality Florida Director Nadine Smith. Castor had served for several years as the department's highly visible liaison to Tampa's gay and lesbian community.

"There was a time when sexism and homophobia would have prevented the most qualified candidate from getting selected," Smith said. "And so it is a testament to her impressive résumé and the progress we've made as a society that she's been named as the new police chief."

Smith said Castor's sexuality should have been included in news coverage by the mainstream news organizations. None mentioned it.

"If you deem it's important to say she's the first woman police chief, then it's equally significant to say she's the first openly lesbian chief," Smith said. "She's out and she always has been."

ADDENDUM: In its Thursday print edition, the *St. Petersburg Times* had updated its article on Castor's appointment to include a brief mention of her sexuality. The

reference was deep within the story and preceded a quote from Equality Florida spokesman Brian Winfield about Castor's role as a liaison to the LGBT community and how her relationship with the community helped the department investigate the slayings of two gay men in Seminole Heights.

In its Friday edition, the Times ran a piece by columnist Sue Carlton that referenced an earlier column she had written in 2005 about Castor's promotion to assistant chief. In her 2005 piece, Carlton noted that the promotion ceremony was attended by Castor's female life partner and their two sons.

The *Tampa Tribune's* Thursday print edition did not include any statement about Castor's sexuality.

Castor succeeds Steve Hogue, who retires Sept. 30 after six years as chief and 29 years with the department. As chief, Castor's starting salary will be \$144,394.

As one of two assistant chiefs, Castor managed about 750 employees and oversaw three districts. During her 25 years of service at TPD, Castor worked in several units, including patrol, narcotics, street crimes, family violence and sex crimes and criminal intelligence.

Castor earned a bachelor's in criminology from the University of Tampa, where she attended on volleyball and basketball scholarships and holds a master's degree in public administration from Troy State University. She is a graduate of the FBI National Academy. Earlier this year, Castor was named Law Enforcement Executive of the Year by the National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives.

A lot of credit was placed upon Castor for Tampa's reduction in crime in recent years. The mayor and outgoing chief added to those accolades at today's announcement. But Castor deflected that praise onto her department and residents.

"I think the Tampa Police Department has done an amazing job in reducing crime over the last few years," she said. "And it is my intention to continue that as police chief. ... The cornerstone to our success in reducing crime has been involving the community as part of the team. Get them engaged and involved in reporting suspicious activity."

Earlier this year, city budget cuts forced the elimination of 34 civilian jobs from the department. Castor said she doesn't think the cuts impacted the department's day-to-day operations, but she acknowledged the agency is doing more with less.

"We have put together an effective operation with processes that can be automated," Castor said. "We've gone as far down as looking at electric bills, toner for copiers, at how we can put forms online as opposed to filling out paper copies."

Adapting to change requires the department be as "fluid of an organization as we can possibly be," she said.

“Law enforcement is not a very fluid profession,” Castor said. “Historically, it’s very rigid and reactive. The Tampa Police Department has been very proactive over the last six years and that’s served us well.”

Castor realizes residents also want to know what she’ll do as chief to make their neighborhoods safer.

“I’m going to do everything in my power to bring down the crime rate and to ensure that there are fewer victims in the city of Tampa,” she said.

As for the hundreds of men and women who will serve under the new chief, Castor said they should expect no surprises from her.

“They can expect the same thing they have seen for the last 25 years,” Castor said. “That’s someone who is very approachable, very fair and very open and honest.”