

Legendary Homicide Detective Gil Carrillo to retire

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Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department detective Lieutenant Gil Carrillo speaks during LASD Academy graduation at the STAR Center in South Whittier Oct. 9, 2009. Carrillo was the co-lead detective on the Night Stalker investigation. (SGVN/Staff photo by Leo Jarzomb)

WHITTIER - Gil Carrillo remembers Aug. 31, 1985 like it was yesterday.

On that day Richard Ramirez, a serial killer who terrorized the Los Angeles area in the mid-1980s, was apprehended.

Twenty-four years later, legendary Sheriff's Homicide Detective Carrillo announced his 38-year journey with the department has come to an end.

Carrillo addressed a graduation ceremony Friday for Sheriff's Academy class 379 at the Sheriff's Training and Regional Services Center. He recalled being a young recruit, about to receive his badge, just like class 379.

"After 38 years I have some words of wisdom to impart on young deputies and their families," he said. "This job is not easy and it's not easy on family life. But you need the family and the family needs you."

Carrillo was emotional Friday, saying he was grateful to the department and to his wife of 39 years. He stressed the need to maintain strong relationships with loved ones, despite the grueling career on which the recruits were about to embark.

But every minute of his nearly four decades of service were worth it, he said.

"If I had to do it all over again," he said, "I wouldn't change a thing."

Carrillo was the first Latino over the rank of sergeant to work in the Homicide Bureau, one of the first members of the plain-clothes gang unit, among others.

While his work was difficult, he said, nothing is more gratifying than bringing a killer to justice and closure to families who have lost loved ones.

He survived dealing with gruesome, tragic scenarios with the support of his loved ones and by learning to "divorce" himself from personal feelings.

"You have to have a morose sense of humor to laugh at things other people wouldn't," he said. "You have to have the support of good friends and family. Without that I'd be a mess like everyone else."

By coincidence Carrillo's badge number is 187, police radio code for murder. Homicide detectives said Carrillo will be missed.

"He was always one of the people you could ask his opinion of," said Detective Philip Guzman. "Somewhere in the vast channels of all his experience you knew he had some idea or advice that would help you in your investigation."

Guzman said Carrillo is funny and has a way of making people feel better with his presence. "He was enthusiastic and he took a lot of pride in not only the Sheriff's Department but the Homicide Bureau in particular," Guzman said. "When you have somebody who's been around that long and still enthusiastic about the job, it's always inspiring to everyone."

Carrillo joined the Sheriff's Department after serving in Vietnam as a combat soldier. As a homicide detective he has toured the world, giving lectures at major institutions and universities.

Newly sworn deputies Friday called Carrillo an inspiration. "I would love to move up the ranks and become a detective," said Alicia Williams, 38, of Hawthorne. "I would like to be in his shoes one day."