

She likes her constable job

BY ANGELA HOGUE

Donna Shearer doesn't see herself as a barrier-breaking feminist carrying the standard into magistrate court. She just likes her job.

Ms. Shearer is the first female deputy constable to work in El Paso County. The work involves aiding Constable Robert Burnside, an elected official, in serving subpoenas for Justice Walter McGhee's Magistrate Court, Precinct 2, in northeast El Paso.

ALTHOUGH SHE IS not paid for her work, Ms. Shearer persisted through a mountain of red tape and state regulations to receive her appointment. She earned an associate of science degree in criminal justice from El Paso Community College to qualify for the job and, with the help of Constable Burnside, achieved the other requirements for certification.

Ms. Shearer holds another job in addition to her constable duties.

It took 240 hours of classroom training and education to get the state to recognize her as qualified for the position.

"THE MALE DEPUTY constables all come from the sheriff's reserve, they got their training that way. . . I had to get my own training," Ms. Shearer said.

"Three years ago, when I began to get interested, there weren't too many women in police work, they were just starting to get into it around here."

Working in a magistrate's office, Ms. Shearer met Constable Burnside, became interested in the duties of a deputy constable and began the exacting task of earning certification.

"I WAS QUALIFIED last year," said Ms. Shearer, who began her formal duties the first of this month. "But we didn't know how to process the paper work. It took us all this time, going through books, to figure it out."

Can serving subpoenas be a dangerous assignment?

"Some people say serving civil papers is dangerous, you don't know what you'll get yourself into. But I never heard of anyone having any trouble. We have background on the people, and know what an individual is like, so we know what to expect. If someone's going to be rough, we send the big, burly guys out on the assignment."

"MOST OF THE work is civil, not criminal, and we get the stuff out so fast they don't know what hit them," she said.

When asked if she can handle herself as well as her male counterparts do on a rough assignment, Ms. Shearer seemed confident of her abilities.

Constable Burnside said, as far as her effectiveness goes, Ms. Shearer's sex doesn't make any difference in the job, although he did say earlier in a telephone interview she would not be sent on a really dangerous assignment.

"WE WOULDN'T SEND one person out alone on something like that, man or woman," he said.

Ms. Shearer said she hopes to continue in law enforcement work and believes the appointment as deputy constable will help her reach that goal.

"I'm doing this mainly for the experience, as far as serving civil papers and learning the civil process. . . I plan to continue my education but don't know exactly what kind of work I'll go into. I like what I'm doing now and I like northeast El Paso.

A NATIVE OF Chicago, Ms. Shearer and her husband moved here several years ago when he was serving in the military. They have a ten-year-old daughter.

Ms. Shearer said she is glad to be working as a deputy constable, but seems uncomfortable with the role of "first female" to serve in the office.

"I don't want to be a figurehead, I just want to show them I'm competent," she said.



Donna Shearer