

The McFarland Women

Natural Resources Police

By Candy Thomson

When Cindy McFarland laid down the law to her two daughters as they were growing up, little did she know they would pick up the law and run with it.

The two girls — now ages 22 and 19 — and their mom are all part of the Maryland Natural Resources Police (NRP) family. Cindy is a vital cog in the agency's records department. Her older daughter, Kristen, graduated from the police academy in October and patrols Anne Arundel County. And Brianna — a member of the first NRP cadet class in more than two decades — hopes to follow in her big sister's footsteps when she turns 20, the minimum age for the academy.

"I'm just so proud of them. They've accomplished so much," says Cindy. "They've never given up."

In the good-cop, bad-cop world of parenting, Cindy was the enforcer when it came to setting parameters.

"One tough customer..." says Kristen.

"...Who's not to be messed with," adds Brianna, finishing the sentence.

But mom also provided career advice when both girls were charting futures beyond graduation from Queen Anne's High School. Cindy pointed out that NRP might be a good fit for girls who grew up hunting and fishing on the Eastern Shore with their father and older brother.

Brianna — known as Breezy — was one of 199 men and women, ranging in age from 18-20, who applied for the revitalized cadet program that began in September 2013. She passed the rigorous physical, written and background checks on the way to being selected as one of the 13 finalists.

Kristen, who was headed for a future as a massage therapist after completing training at Chesapeake College, passed the same tests and interview board to become a member of the 56th Basic Recruit Class that began in April 2014.

The McFarlands aren't the first family affair at the agency, though their situation is unique. Joe Ward — one of Kristen's academy classmates — has been assigned to the same patrol area as his dad, Officer First Class Robert Ward. Sgt. Jack Bailey and Sgt. David Bailey are both brothers and NRP brothers-in-arms.

"You often find family members working in the same police or fire agency. But three women from the same family in the same agency — that's beyond rare," explains Lt. Col. Alphonso Hawkins, NRP's recently retired deputy superintendent.

From Day 1, training took the girls on different tracks, with Kristen heading for the academy's classrooms and supervised field work and Brianna shadowing officers in the field and on the water in real-life situations. At home on weekends, the two swap stories.

Brianna hopes the cadet training will give her a leg up if she gets selected to attend the academy. "I'm getting paid to learn. As a cadet, you get to see different styles of policing and interacting with the public," she says, noting that she has worked in Talbot, Queen Anne's and Baltimore counties, and spent a three-month stint at Sandy Point State Park.

Cindy says watching two daughters prepare for law enforcement careers has been rewarding, but also has given her pause.

"As a mother, absolutely I worry. What mother of an officer doesn't?" asks Cindy.



Left to right: Cadet Briana McFarland, Cynthia McFarland, Officer Kristen McFarland

"But that's what they've been trained for."

The McFarland women are a tight-knit bunch, with dark, dancing eyes and nearly identical smiles. Their closeness was a comfort during the initial months of rigorous training.

But when Kristen was enduring a rough stretch during her 28 weeks at the academy, Cindy provided a little tough love at the Sunday dinner table.

"It was time for her to go back and she was staring at the clock. Her eyes filled up," Cindy recalls. "I said, 'That's it. Get up. You're done here. Out the door.'"

Even though the daughters still live at home, shift work means there's little time for the McFarlands to compare notes. But that doesn't mean they don't try.

One recent winter morning, Cindy stumbled into the kitchen to start the coffee maker. Stuck to the front of the fresh-brewed pot, was a pink Post-It: "Have a good day, Mama. Love you, Kristen." ■

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