



DEPUTY CHIEF MINDY GABRIEL

Helps Shape Westerville Public Safety Efforts

Deputy Chief Mindy Gabriel is less than a full year on the job. In Westerville, that is. She's a 18-year career firefighter/ medic who started in the fire service in Upper Arlington, and joined the Westerville Division of Fire (WFD) to help shape emergency medical services as technology, innovation and health care evolve.

WHY A CAREER IN THE FIRE SERVICE?

It is all about teamwork and service to others. If I wasn't doing this work, I would be working in health care. I love how the fire service intersects with not only the community but also the health care system. I am very curious about when industries intersect because this is usually where innovation happens. I think it is a very exciting time to be in our line of work. We are primed to do and learn new things, and I'm honored to be a part of it.

WHEN DID YOU MAKE THAT DECISION? WAS IT SOMETHING YOU ASPIRED TO FROM CHILDHOOD?

I had just finished up my senior season at OSU of rowing for the Buckeyes, and I was an athlete without a team. Someone encouraged me to test for Upper Arlington Fire. They said the physical capability test was hard but that I would love the job. I passed the test and fell in love with the work.

I am a bit of an accidental firefighter, but the work fits me perfectly. I have no family members that were in the fire service as a child but they were all hardworking, disciplined people. Most of my family are farmers and shift workers. My mother was a night-shift nurse and my father ran a farm and worked at the Ashland County Highway Department. Everyone I was around worked constantly and at all hours of the day. I would say my childhood taught me that I wanted to serve others and it could look a lot of different ways.

WHAT HAS BEEN CHALLENGING ABOUT ASCENDING TO A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN A TRADITIONALLY MALE-DOMINATED LINE OF WORK? WHAT HAS BEEN MOST REWARDING?

It is a long road filled with some barriers and roadblocks both self-imposed and put up by others. The key is to recognize the difference. I try to take gender out of the equation. I have known from day one that I would have to work harder than others all while making it look incredibly easy. I try not to make excuses and just keep looking ahead, focusing on what I can control. It has been rewarding to look back and see all the things I have been able to be part of in the fire service, and how they have prepared me for the position I am in now to help us get better.



Photo Credit: Chris Crisman Photography, LLC

WHAT DID YOU KNOW ABOUT WESTERVILLE BEFORE YOU CAME ABOARD?

What really attracted me to Westerville was the heart of the firefighters. I had responded on February 10th (2018) as part of a peer-support team (for medics who worked the day WPD Officers Anthony Morelli and Eric Joering were killed) and spent the next week in the firehouses, spending time with the crew members involved on that terrible day. I could see how much they loved and had dedicated themselves to their jobs and each other. I knew I could be part of that.

WHAT ARE YOUR OBJECTIVES FOR WFD AS DEPUTY CHIEF? WHAT DO YOU ASPIRE TO ACCOMPLISH?

Right now, a few major items I am focusing on are improving cardiac survivability outcomes, creating a robust quality improvement program and developing a community paramedic program in Westerville.

WHO ARE YOUR ROLE MODELS? DID ANY INFLUENCE YOU TO PURSUE YOUR PROFESSION?

I have been influenced by so many. A few of my favorites are my first rowing coach, Lou O'Brien. She took a chance

on me and taught me discipline. I have a group of older adult friends in their 80s and 90s, they run circles around me, they are tough and smart. They have all created great things in their lives by investing in others. They have taught me the lesson of generosity. They have supported me my entire journey.

WHEN YOUNGER GIRLS OR OTHER WOMEN IN GENERAL SEE YOU IN THIS ROLE, WHAT'S THE TYPICAL REACTION?

Curiosity; they are interested in my experience. I get a lot of questions. I love talking with people about my career choice.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR FAMILY.

My family of origin is huge. I am the oldest of six children. I am married to a firefighter and have three school-age children: Porter (12), Dane (9) and Rose (6). We have a dog named Sam and a turtle named Tammy.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO IN YOUR FREE TIME?

I love to be outside. Hiking, running and gardening. I am passionate about traveling and seeing the world. I love to read!

Women's Work: Stories from Pioneering Women Shaping Our Workforce.

Chief Gabriel talks about how she got involved:

"I used to live in Clintonville. My neighbor was a photographer. A colleague of hers, Chris Crisman called out to his friends looking to do a passion project for his young daughter shooting images of women doing non-traditional work. He flew to Columbus from Philly to, as he said, "Get one good shot." The project took him all over the country. The original set of photographs that I was in was small but the series went viral and got a lot of attention, which prompted more photographs and the book. I am honored to be part of the book and series. Chris is an amazingly talented photographer."

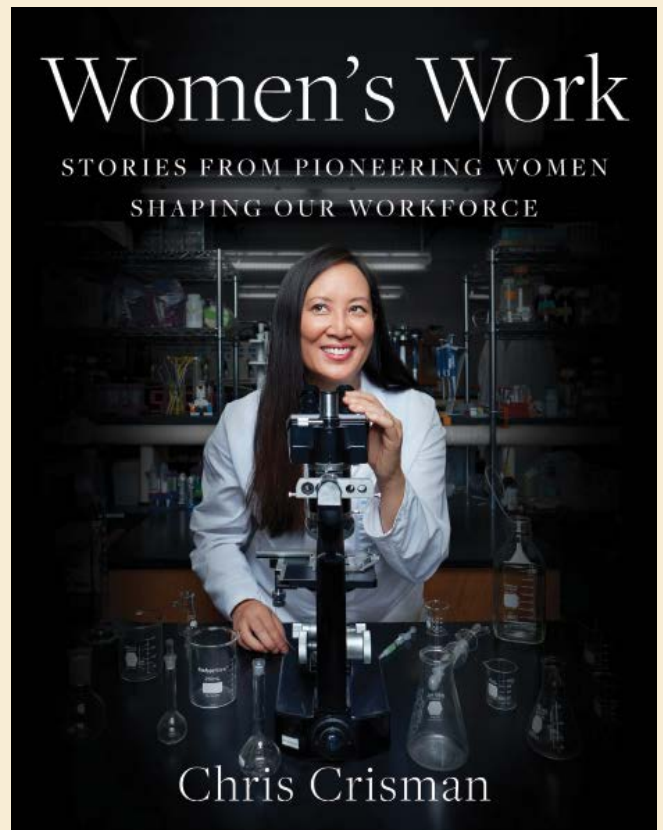


Image Credit: Simon & Schuster