

DENVER CITY COUNCIL



Proclamation No. 25-0719

A Proclamation Honoring Denver's First Crime Director Joseph Moomaw

WHEREAS, the Denver Police Crime Laboratory has a long and well-deserved reputation using advanced technology and excellence to further advance our criminal justice system and many times provide closure for victims of crime; and

WHEREAS, this longstanding reputation began with its founder Denver Police Captain Joseph Fredrick Moomaw; and

WHEREAS, Joseph Moomaw as born in Lyons, Colorado on July 19, 1913, to Charles and Bertha Moomaw and was one of six children; and

WHEREAS, he received his primary education at the local Lyons Montgomery school house. Young Joe Moomaw was always known to be intellectually curious and a hard-working individual; and

WHEREAS, in 1929, when construction of the massive effort to build Trail Ridge Road commenced, it was no surprise that Joe Moomaw answered the call to become a laborer in this important effort to build economic opportunity; and

WHEREAS, the effort to build this highway was very labor intensive with steep grades and difficult weather conditions. The road took nine years to complete finally opening to traffic in 1938. The Moomaw family believes that the experience he received on this project resulted in his intense interest in ballistic and explosive science; and

WHEREAS, in 1934, he married Eileen Winona, and they had several children including: Leonard, Joleen DeAnna, Rita and Marcella. Later they adopted their grandchildren Joseph and Mitchel due to a death in the family; and

WHEREAS, in 1940, Joseph Moomaw joined the Denver Police Department and unsurprisingly finished first in his academy class; and

WHEREAS, in 1947 with the approval of departmental and civic leadership he founded the Denver Police Crime Laboratory. Since forensic science was then in its infancy the department allocated a very small space in Denver Police Headquarters. Moomaw and his staff worked very hard from the beginning achieving top ratings in narcotics analysis, firearms identification, ballistics analysis, general chemical analysis, poison analysis, explosive detection and disposition, handwriting and document analysis. Moomaw used his own funds to purchase key equipment including the first microscope that is currently on display in the crime lab lobby, Moomaw also led the effort which made Denver one of the first six cities in the United States to develop mobile crime vehicles which could take scientific analysis into the field; and

WHEREAS, Moomaw's intellectual curiosity continued throughout his life. An article in the Rocky Mountain News discussed how he attended night classes at Colorado University eventually earning a degree in toxicology. He became very well known in the Denver area with numerous articles emphasizing his technical prowess, and his scientific commitment to justice. He served as the Chairman of the International Association of Identification; and

WHEREAS, Moomaw retired from the Denver Police Department in 1967, after 27 years of service. He traveled to South Vietnam as part of USAID to help develop police crime laboratories in local communities. In 1970, he was appointed by Governor John A. Love as Director of the State Crime Laboratory after a scandal broke out at that facility; and

WHEREAS, after serving the state for several years, Moomaw successfully retired and he and his wife enjoyed family and travel expensively around the world, passing away on February 16, 1998, at the age of 85.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED BY THE DENVER CITY COUNCIL:

Section 1. That the Denver City Council recognizes the outstanding service and career of Denver Police Captain Joe Moomaw and his ongoing legacy of excellence with the continued service of the Denver Police Crime Laboratory.

Section 2. That the Clerk and Recorder of the City and County of Denver shall affix the seal of the City and County of Denver to this proclamation and that a copy be transmitted to the Moomaw Family, the Denver Police Crime Laboratory and the Denver Police Museum.

PASSED BY THE COUNCIL May 12, 2025

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PRESIDENT

