

Nick Cocchi sworn in as new Hampden County sheriff, crowd bids farewell to Michael Ashe Jr.



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LUDLOW -- They began and ended with the tolling of a bell.

Now-retired Hampden County Sheriff Michael J. Ashe Jr.'s legendary tenure came to an end with seven tolls of the former York Street jail bell and new Hampden County Sheriff Nick Cocchi's tenure began with a single one. The chimes represented Ashe's seven terms in office and Cocchi's entrance to his first.



Historic bell marks transition of Hampden Sheriff's Department from Ashe to Cocchi

Cocchi was sworn in by Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito at precisely 10:15 a.m. on Wednesday. He follows Ashe, who served 42 years in office. While Ashe ran as a young social worker for the seat, Cocchi is the only sheriff in the county's history to have spent his entire career there, according to Ashe.

"He's the first sheriff in our history to work his way up from an entry-level corrections officer all the way to sheriff," said Ashe, who received three standing ovations during an address in the gymnasium at the Ludlow jail.

The venue was packed with mayors, state and law enforcement officials and supporters of Ashe and Cocchi.

Both Ashe and Cocchi became briefly overcome by emotion while addressing the crowd, and the ceremony was punctuated by the "Rocky" movie franchise's theme songs, which Ashe has adopted as his own.

Cocchi launched his hard-fought campaign more than two years ago when Ashe announced that he intended to retire. After the swearing-in, Cocchi said he envisioned the moment many times while driving in his car on the campaign trail.

"And I can tell you, those daydreams didn't even come close to this," Cocchi said. "But this day is more about saying thank-you to Mike Ashe - the finest public servant in the region, in my opinion. I only needed five minutes on the back end to get sworn in."

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