

The Break Room with Chief of Police, Jennifer Michaux, January 6, 2026

Narrator:

You've tuned into another edition of The Break Room, a weekly conversation about how the City of St. Augustine works from those who do the work every day. Hosted by the City of St. Augustine's Communications Director, Melissa Wissel, The Break Room offers a closer look at the different city departments and provides updates on current and upcoming projects and events. And now your host, Melissa Wissel.

Melissa Wissel:

Thanks for tuning in to another edition of The Break Room. I'm Melissa Wissel, Communications Director for the City of St. Augustine. This week I'd like to welcome back for her second and probably final appearance, St. Augustine Police Chief, Jennifer Michaux.

Her first appearance was back in July of 2021, following her swearing in as St. Augustine's first female police chief. She launched her career with fireworks over the Matanzas and is now closing out with Nights of Lights coming to an end. Chief, welcome back.

Chief Jennifer Michaux:

Hi, thank you for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

I was looking through our notes from our first interview right after you became chief and it just sort of made an impression on me that you came in with a bang and there's a lot going on with you leaving. There's been a lot of heightened awareness of public safety, I would say, since in your time here.

Chief Jennifer Michaux:

Absolutely, absolutely. It's because of technology, with technology changes and individuals struggling. I mean, we went through COVID and you and I were speaking a little bit about that, about the COVID years and coming in right after COVID and people coming back out and some people dealing with being that they were, you know, shut-ins.

And so we, yeah, we came into a lot of interesting times in the last four years.

Melissa Wissel:

A lot of changes. Fireworks this past year and Nights of Lights has been a huge change.

Chief Michaux:

A huge change.

Melissa Wissel:

Give me a recap, sort of, of how you see how things have evolved and moving forward what you see as sort of our new normal for police and what we can expect in the community.

Chief Michaux:

This is definitely a new normal, the public safety, just because in the way individuals sometimes act out. The fireworks was a practice run for Nights of Lights for the entire city, for every division.

So we, using the barricades and trying to, for lack of a better words, corral people and direct them, kind of like you do in different areas, is sending them different ways. So I think the bike racks, everyone seeing those has been a big surprise, but we had unattended consequences during, I think back when we had the Christmas parade in the beginning of December. I remember getting out there and looking at the streets going, oh no, the bike racks are up and the Christmas parade is coming.

Right. And so that was, that was unique because we never had the bike racks up with the Christmas parade.

Melissa Wissel:

So people had to stay behind it.

Chief Michaux:

They had to stay behind, which, yeah, we were always walking up and down the street and, you know, kids get so excited and they start, they start crowding where the floats come and those are some big floats, especially when they got to make that turn on Cathedral. And so that was a nice unintended consequences for the, when we had that parade. And then, you know, when then we went into the boat regatta.

Right. And so the bike racks serves besides just the regular Nights of Lights that we dealt with is some of the larger events we had downtown is trying to keep the people out of the roadway because that was our biggest complaint last year.

Melissa Wissel:

Right.

Chief Michaux:

Is when the vehicles were stopped, people would just take over the roads.

Melissa Wissel:

Or they dart out in the middle of the intersection or middle of the roads.

Chief Michaux:

Right.

In between the cars. Yeah. Well, in between the crosswalks.

So you got cars stopping for the crosswalks and then a herd of people would just get in the middle of the street and you can't stop them once they start.

Melissa Wissel:

Right.

Chief Michaux:

And it's like a, it's like a line of ants.

Melissa Wissel:

And overall success this year.

Chief Michaux:

Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

With Nights of Lights.

Chief Michaux:

Yeah. It went really well. A lot of changes during it.

We had a lot of plans and, you know, we were, we're doing weekly meetings and making the changes that were appropriate that we saw. And I think we got a good hold on it right away.

Melissa Wissel:

So you're going to leave a really long checklist when you leave on your desk of what they need to do next year.

Chief Michaux:

There was a lot of checklists to leave behind. A lot of different things that when you get in that position, you don't know you're going to deal with. You would have never have guessed you were going to deal with.

Melissa Wissel:

So let me just tee you up for that. You just opened the door there. What would you say some of the things that you didn't expect, good or bad?

Chief Michaux:

Just the simple things you don't think of until you deal with our city attorney and she reminds you of some of the things you should deal with, what you need to do.

And one of the big things that I got my hand slapped right away when I became chief was we did an art contest with Flagler College for Officer Dee Brown's car. And we used the digital arts department to make a wrap for his car. What did you think of, like St. Augustine, what do you think of? And these students were able to give us their suggestions of how his car should be wrapped.

So they were able to use this in their portfolio. They were all seniors. And when we picked the car, so excited, we went all for it.

And then you got the attorney looking at, well, do you have an artist release? Do you have this? I'm like, no, they're Flagler students, artist release. They're not an artist they're a student.

Melissa Wissel:

Did you trademark it? Yeah.

Chief Michaux:

So it's little things like that that you learn. So when I was making my checklist that I started from day one, as I kept learning things, luckily, in the big bold at the bottom, when in doubt, ask Isabel.

Melissa Wissel:

There you go.

So big shout out to Isabel. She's listening to me, just knocking her head. But the good thing is we learn from her.

Melissa Wissel:

Right. She she makes an impression and we learn from her.

Chief Michaux:

Yeah.

And she keeps us honest as as a leader, especially when I'm sorry, I have sixty three children. Right. You know, I've got to learn from all of them.

And sometimes it's good. Sometimes it's bad. But you learn from them.

You put the strengths around them. And so you can pass the information down to them from the other city directors that I've learned things from how to handle some things.

Melissa Wissel:

Best thing and anything that of note that like you can think of like that was like cool thing, I guess I should say, not just best, but like something that was really cool that you got to do or that you were privy to because of being chief celebrities.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah, I'm not one of those celebrity people. You know, they put their pants on like we do.

You know, so I'm not I'm not big into the gaga over on celebrities. But I think just some of the stuff that we focused on down at the downtown with the nightlife and with livable, you know, with our residents and our visitors, because, I mean, honestly, in the 30 years I've been here, the citizens are amazing. They support us.

We've never we've never felt like our citizens didn't like our police department or respect us or work with us. It's the visitors that were always the challenge because they're on vacation and rules don't apply to you when you're on vacation. So I think just addressing some of the nightlight stuff, bringing on Jabari White as our nighttime manager to handle just that side of the house.

And more importantly, when we did some reorganization, the first thing I did was I took a sergeant's position and doubled their duties so I could get a sergeant downtown on a bike unit. So expanding the bike unit and having them grow and having the people down there. So that person, the bike unit, when I took over was just four individuals that rode a bike downtown and it grew into four individuals on a bike with the supervisors, two people on foot.

So it's an entire squad to just address everything that's happening downtown at night.

Melissa Wissel:

If you're just now tuning in, you're listening to *The Break Room*. I'm Melissa Wissel, communications director for the city of St. Augustine with soon to be retired police chief Jennifer Michaux.

Talking about the reassigning the personnel, creating the bike unit, you also worked on consolidating dispatch services.

Chief Michaux:

Yeah, that was difficult.

Melissa Wissel:

That was big.

Chief Michaux:

That was big. That was huge. Yeah, when Sheriff Hardwick took over in 2020 and I took over in 2021, that was one of the first hard conversations I ever had.

That was probably the hardest decision I ever made in my job as police chief was you were losing a part of your family.

Melissa Wissel::

I was going to say, explain to folks what that really means because most people don't understand when they call 911. In that moment, you don't really think about who you're getting.

You just need someone on the other end of the phone. So what did that mean?

Chief Michaux:

Yeah, so we had our own dispatch. We had our own crew, most of them ladies inside our building, face to face, working side to side with us.

And that is one of the hardest jobs in law enforcement, if not the hardest job. And it's still struggling to this day, trying to get qualified people to do that job. So you always see us helping the Sheriff's office hire people for that position.

It's a very gratifying job. But we were struggling and getting individuals. So it just seemed like a no brainer to just go ahead and put it together.

And it's not unusual. There's consolidated dispatches all across the nation. It's real big in the state of Florida.

And in the big scheme of things, it was the best decision we ever made. The response times are faster. Like you said, nobody knows who they're getting when they call.

We have officers could be coming to and from work, and there might be a call right outside the city, but an officer's right there and they can take it. There's no delay anymore. And we're all on the same computer system, the same radio system.

And the response times are just quicker.

Melissa Wissel:

I had one of our former, I think she's former, dispatch officers come on because we have a dispatch appreciation week or something like that. And she shared with us just the challenges and the burnout because of what you're dealing with on the other end.

I can't imagine picking up a phone at my job every day. And literally, everything is an emergency.

Chief Michaux:
Everything's emergency.

It could be an emergency or it could be my cable's not working. And you have to talk them through that. It's the craziest job.

And it's a great job. And we are so thankful for them.

Melissa Wissel:
And the partnership with the sheriff's office, just to retrace a little bit of with Nights of Lights and Fireworks, great partnership, having them come in to help us support all of those efforts.

Chief Michaux:
Absolutely. And the sheriff and I, we were zone partners back in the 90s.

Melissa Wissel:
So you guys go way back.

Chief Michaux:
Yeah. I'm sworn to secrecy. So don't ask anything that the sheriff has done.

Melissa Wissel:
We don't have enough time for that.

Chief Michaux:
Even with the beach with Dan Carswell, you won't know who's coming to the door. That's what we expect.

If somebody needs assistance, it doesn't matter. Just take care of it and move on. And yeah, with the sheriff's office, they're bigger. Using some of their assets that we don't have is always is always useful for us.

Melissa Wissel:
And one of the other topics real quick before we sign off, we've got a few more minutes. You also worked internally.

Tell me about the sponsorship program that you started when you told me about that. I wasn't aware of it. So that was interesting and exciting to me.

Yeah. You did that.

Chief Michaux:

Yeah.

Very, very competitive to get into law enforcement. So you want to get the the individuals up front. We were finding that some of the sheriff's offices that are surrounding us, not St. John's, but the ones surrounding us were coming into our local academy and offering people jobs before they even finished the academy.

And we're like, well, wait a minute. So you don't want to say you land up with the bottom of the barrel. But, you know, when when you're coming in, they're doing interviews.

You know, they're snatching the people right off the front. So we decided, well, we have to get ahead of this and what we can offer individuals. So we started doing a sponsorship.

So we interview individuals before they go to the academy. We hire them and then we support them either through the academy, financially and academically if needed. And so we're getting the better, you know, sorry, the better candidates, you know, and hopefully getting first first pick.

Melissa Wissel:

So there so that's actually getting folks before they go in.

Chief Michaux:

Correct.

Melissa Wissel:

Now, what's the do people drop out? I mean, there's a risk.

Chief Michaux:

There's a risk,

Melissa Wissel:

but that's OK.

Chief Michaux:

There is a risk. You know, it's like, you know, back to being a kid and playing kickball and you just you pick your teams, right? That's what you hope you're picking the best team right up in front.

Right. So that's been it's been really useful for our training department and buy in from all the officers because they sit on the interview board. This is the person is going to be working next to you, you know, and this these are the people we want.

And it's worked out very well for us so far.

Melissa Wissel:

And we we recently had a swearing in and the young man was from Ponte Vedra.

Chief Michaux:

Yes.

Melissa Wissel:

And I actually well, he said because I did ask him, you had the you could have gone to both.
And he did say

Chief Michaux:

it was the ride along

Melissa Wissel:

the ride along. Yes.

And getting to know people ahead of time. But yeah, the ride along ride along as well.

Chief Michaux:

Yeah. Ride alongs are huge.

We let the academy students ride along and like Flagler students that are in criminal justice programs. We don't have a open ride along program. Let me get that out there.

Melissa Wissel:

Can I just call and sign up?

Chief Michaux:

No, it's very strict because there's there's a lot inherent risk with riding along. So it's it's it's very closed of who can do it.

but that is definitely one thing because you're picking your family. You're about to spend a lot of time with somebody. So ride along with as many agencies you can and figure out where you fit in best, what your personality and what you want to do.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, because they're possibly going to save your life or you may be saving theirs. So you want to make sure there's that there's that fit.

So before we wrap up, big question, what will you miss the most?

Chief Michaux:

Oh, gosh.

Melissa Wissel:

You know, and it's OK. You don't have to say me.

What will you miss the most?

Chief Michaux:

You know, I really enjoy working the events. People think I'm crazy even right now out there at the Christmas parade. They're like, why are you out working the Christmas parade? I've always enjoyed the events.

You know, I was out during the regatta. I was out during Christmas. I was out during Thanksgiving.

I like being out there with the people and like hearing the feedback and seeing firsthand what's going on. I just and working with my my crew, you know, just being side by side is as much as I can get out of the office as possible as the part I'm going to miss.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, you're going to go home to a crew of one.

Your husband.

Chief Michaux:

Thirty three years of marriage, hopefully we'll make it to thirty four now.

Melissa Wissel:

There you go.

Well, we I can't begin to say thank you for your service just seems like not enough. I get a little bit choked up. I you know, it's it's been a pleasure working with you.

We've been so fortunate to have you. And before I get.

Chief Michaux:

Thank you for your friendship.

Melissa Wissel:

All these emotional, you know, and don't be a stranger.

Chief Michaux:

Oh, I won't. Thank you.

Melissa Wissel:

Thanks so much for coming to see us. If you missed part of this broadcast, I want to go back and listen from the beginning, or if you'd like to hear past interviews, catch it on the website at CityStAugRadio.com. We want to keep you informed about what's happening in and around the city and that you hear it here from the people making it happen every day. Stay connected with us on social.

You'll find us on Facebook, Instagram and X. And you'll also find the Police Department @STAugPD on Instagram and Facebook. Until next time, thanks for tuning in.

Narrator:

You've been listening to *The Break Room*, addressing projects and programs by the City of St. Augustine. Join us each week as the City's Communication Director, Melissa Wissel, has in depth conversations with the people who make our town work to meet the needs of our community. See you at this time next week for another edition of *The Break Room*.