

Charles Giunta has worked as port director in Rochester for 10 years

By TOM ADAMS

Charles Giunta recalls an elderly Mexican lady, hunched over, with a black shawl over her head, walking slowly across the bridge to El Paso, Texas, where Giunta worked as a border patrol officer.

"You take her into an interview room and all of a sudden her chest starts moving," he says. "You find out, after a female officer examines her, that she's got parrots stuffed in each bra cup, trying to smuggle them into the U.S. because they're (worth) \$1,000 apiece," he says.

Working for U.S. Department of Homeland Security Customs and Border Protection in Rochester comes with far fewer surprises than what Giunta saw working more than 20 years in El Paso but nonetheless "is probably one of the most interesting jobs you could ever have," he says.

"Anything and everything you can imagine is smuggled through the border there," the 62-year-old Rochester na-

He is the point man at Rochester's port

tive says of his time in Texas.

In fact, it is difficult for Giunta to limit the most unusual smuggling incident he has experienced to just one.

There is the man with plastic hair rollers attached by safety pins to the inside of his topcoat, each of which holds a tiny exotic bird.

"They take these little exotic birds and give them tequila to knock them out. They're \$200 apiece. He's carrying 10 of them in his topcoat," he says.

Or checking the trunks of cars.

"You're searching around and moving the bags in the back of the car. You pick up a burlap bag and it starts to move in your hand. It's full of rattlesnakes. Or you find a box full of tarantulas."

All happened on Giunta's watch.

"These are common occurrences down there. And the drugs are just free-flowing."

"It's the old west, still," he says. "There are shootings. There are bodies every morning. It's still a very violent society down there. The whole Mexican border is like that. It's a different world, totally unlike what you would see here."

Rochester, on the other hand, provides a more conventional environment for customs officials.

"It's entirely different in that you're dealing mainly with business," Giunta says. "What you see here is desks and pens and pencils. It's for all the cargo that comes in to all of the plants here in Rochester."

"We have to check the cargo, assess the duties, collect the monies, and make sure it meets all the requirements. We do get out and check it, open it up. Along with that, naturally, you're looking for terrorism and drugs that might come in."

Giunta supervises six officers, including 30-year employee John Bugajski.

"I've had three or four port directors during my time here," Bugajski says. "He's probably the most knowledgeable and the most customs-oriented and goal-oriented. He's tried to make our port as well-run as possible."

Christal Karmazyn came to Rochester two years ago after serving as a customs officer in Buffalo.

"He's a great supervisor," she says of Giunta. "He's very well-rounded. He knows so much. There's nothing he hasn't done before. He's taught me a lot. I came from the land border (in Buffalo), so this whole environment is different for me."

Giunta's department handles 800 to 1,500 airplanes a year, more than 2,000 private boats, and all cargo coming through Rochester, Giunta says. The cargo results in \$30 million in duties.

The Rochester department's responsibilities are considerably different, Giunta says, since the terror attacks

of Sept. 11, 2001.

"We're doing a lot more high-profile looking," he says. "We're small, but because business has dropped off in Rochester, we're capable of handling what's here. It's not a heavy workload. It's not like working the bridges (in the Buffalo area) where there's a constant flow of

cars and trucks."

Rochester native

Giunta, a Pittsford resident, was born and raised in Rochester. He was graduated from the Edison Technical and Occupational Center and took classes at Monroe Community College and the SUNY College at Brockport.

He started his professional career as an electrician. "Everybody asks how I got into law enforcement," Giunta says. "I used to work as a private investigator here in Rochester. A friend of mine and me one day saw a little matchbook, the kind that says 'Would you like to be an artist?' We saw one that said 'Would you like to be a federal law enforcement officer?'"

"We were semi-involved in law enforcement because we were doing undercover, private-investigator type work. We saw this as a good opportunity to move into something else. Besides, working as an electrician in Rochester, it gets cold in the wintertime. It seemed like a great idea."

They called the toll-free number to apply for the test. The process took one year. Giunta became a border patrol agent in 1977. He was interviewed in Buffalo for the position.

"I must've said something wrong because they sent

Continued on next page

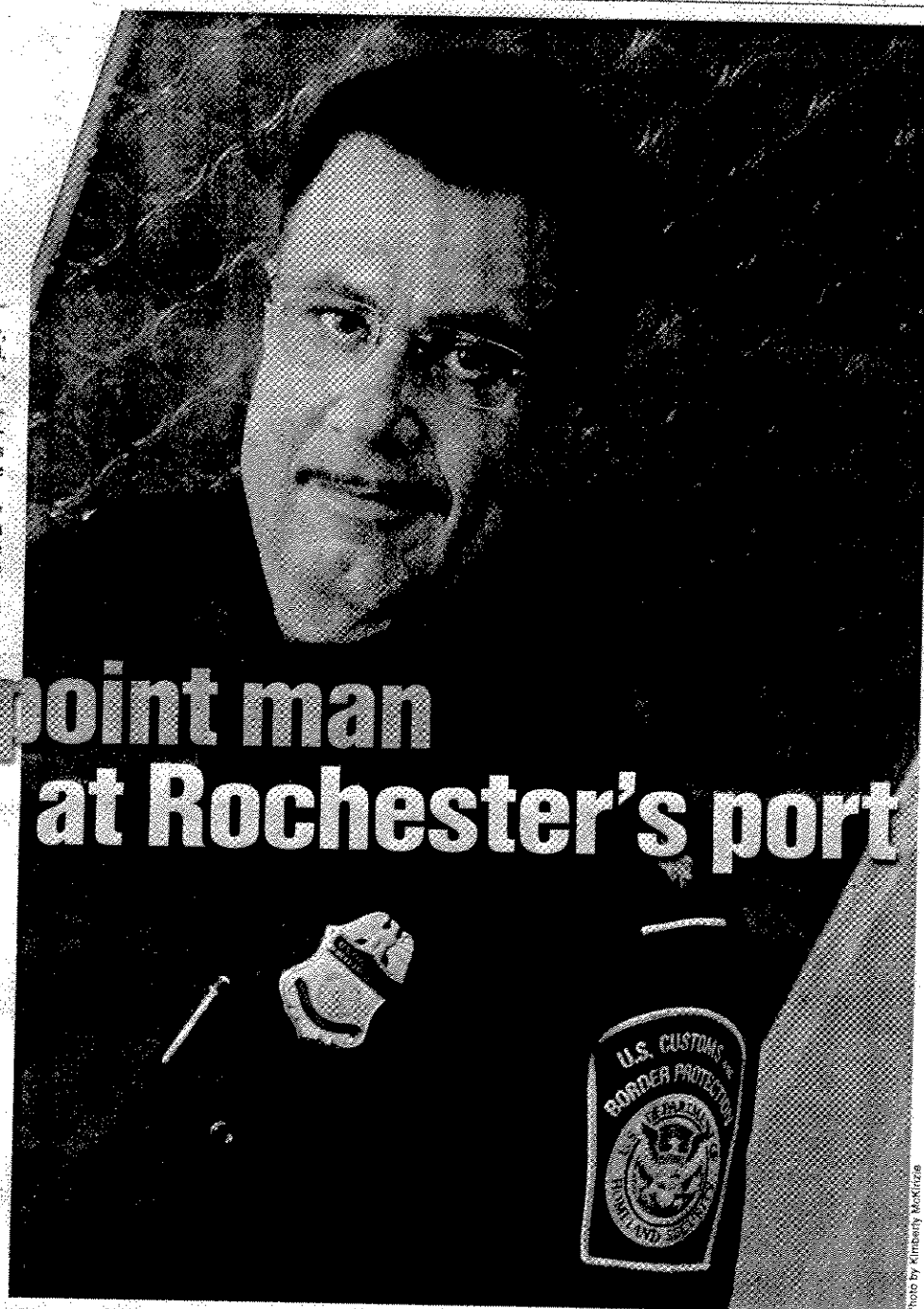


Photo by Kimberly McKinnis

CLOSE-UP

Charles Giunta

Title: Port director, U.S. Department of Homeland Security Customs and Border Protection
Age: 62

Home: Pittsford

Education: Graduated from Edison Technical and Occupational Center, 1962

Family: Son, Christopher, 33; daughter, Cattina, 31

Hobbies: Meditating, photography

Quote: "Most people are not even aware that there's a U.S. Customs office in Rochester. When they see me and my officers in uniform, they say, 'Oh, are you from Buffalo?' I mean, we are Rochester International Airport. We are one of the four international airports in the state of New York."

Continued from previous page

me down to El Paso for the next 20 years," he jokes.

He left border patrol for a job as a prison guard for one and a half years, then joined U.S. Customs.

"This is probably one of the most interesting jobs you could ever have because you don't know what's going to happen from minute to minute, especially if you're working the border, the bridges, like I did for years," Giunta says. "This car pulls up that's a family. The next car could be escaped convicts. The next car could be a wanted murderer. The next car could be just a guy with his two kids. You never know what you're going to get into."

Giunta patrolled the bridges for four years, then became president of the local employees union.

"So I traveled all over the country negotiating contracts and ran the union down in El Paso for the employees," Giunta says. "That got to be a 10- to 12-hour-a-day job. When this position opened up, they said, would you like to go back to Rochester? I said sure."

Coming home

That was 10 years ago. He no longer worries about hidden birds. He does, however, monitor customs-related issues involving aircraft at Greater Rochester International Airport—where his office is located—and boats on Lake Ontario.

"We have the waterfront, with all the private boats that come in," Giunta says. "We have one commercial boat that comes in every two weeks with concrete dust. And then you have all the planes that land here." He admits to being disappointed that, upon returning to Rochester, the business climate was roughly the same as when he left the area 10 years ago.

"The fortunate and unfortunate thing is, nothing changed," he says. "The streets, the culture, everything was the same. But that's bad for business because business never kept up with the times. Business was the same, too."

"There wasn't any foresight into getting new business here and keeping the businesses that were here. I've seen it dwindle in the 10 years I've been here."

Rochester, he says, has not taken advantage of its position as an international port of entry.

"We have no means of bringing international cargo directly to Rochester. We have no air freight. We have no sea freight, because we don't have a big harbor, and we have no intermodal rail system," Giunta says.

Rochester-area manufacturers are forced to bring needed goods in by truck—"at great expense," Giunta says—then transported out by truck to be sold globally, he says.

"Everything lands at another port of entry such as New York or Chicago and is trucked in and out of Rochester," he says. "We have to realize we're in a global marketplace, where companies purchase their products, their raw materials, globally."

"The city of Rochester and Monroe County have to start looking at what they can do to open this up as a direct international import market directly into Rochester, to entice and keep new business in Rochester."

The answers, he says, are expensive ones, but with long-term economic benefits.

"They're not simple solutions," Giunta says. "It's expensive to open up a port of

entry here in Rochester so we can have boats with cargo land here. The (airport) runways have to be modified so we can look at possibly getting international air carriers with cargo into here."

The fast ferry

One possibility, he says, is a ferry to replace the 284-foot-long, five-story-high and 78-foot-wide vessel that left the port in Charlotte last week. Giunta was involved routinely in customs issues related to the Spirit of Ontario I and helped design the terminal where the ferry was docked.

"It's unfortunate that it failed, but the boat was too big," he says of an endeavor that ran for abbreviated seasons in 2004 and 2005 before being shut down by Mayor Robert Duffy in January 2006.

"It just couldn't support the economy of Rochester. A boat a third of that size would be able to survive, I think."

But you can't fill an 800-passenger boat every single day," he says.

Giunta thinks the ferry terminal should remain as such.

"There is a market for it, but with a smaller boat. It would be a shame to waste that building. We need a means of bringing international cargo into Rochester, if we want to survive and grow here," Giunta says. "That's the perfect venue for it."

"Everybody in the marine industry will tell you that cargo makes money, passengers do not. Why not get both out of that terminal? Why not use the same real estate for two purposes?"

Off the job, Giunta is a volunteer mediator, arbitrator and facilitator for the Center for Dispute Settlement Inc., for child custody and visitation cases for family court.

He speaks on customs issues to a variety of groups.

He teaches customs and international imports and exports to business classes at area colleges, including SUNY College at Geneseo, St. John Fisher College, Nazareth College of Rochester and Monroe Community College.

"I joined this (profession) to serve and protect, and part of it is to serve," he says of his public service. "That means helping people. I enjoy helping people. Otherwise I would've retired years ago. But I enjoy dealing with people and serving people. And it's a good thing to do."

He does not plan to retire for at least four years.

"I don't plan on retiring till I'm 66," he says. "I still feel I can do this job efficiently. My job is my life."

His expertise in public speaking is due, in part, to 10 years spent as a magician, Giunta says. He worked at stage shows and auto shows, among other sites.

"That was here in Rochester, years and years ago," he says. "That was just a hobby. I don't have time to do it now. But that helped me in my career because now I can go out and do public speaking engagements for large groups."

He describes himself as a "very advanced amateur" photographer of landscapes and fine arts.

"I love my work here," Giunta says. "I love dealing with the people. A lot of people are afraid of customs. But I run my port as a partnership. Without the businesses, I don't have a job. Without me, they don't have a job."

"If there's a problem, call me immediately and we'll work out the problem. We'll figure out what's wrong and then continue on so we can bring more business to Rochester."

tdadams@rbj.net / 585-546-8303

FREE FROM HOTSPOTS

LIMITED-TIME OFFER \$19.99 PCS 740 PC CARD

Verizon Wireless gives you broadband access where most HotSpots can't.

- Available in 181 major metro areas in the U.S. covering over 148 million people and growing
- No need to search for HotSpots
- Typical speeds of 400 to 700 Kbps — capable of reaching speeds up to 2 Mbps

CALL 1.800.807.8407 NOW.

Verizon Wireless gives you broadband access where most HotSpots can't.

- Available in 181 major metro areas in the U.S. covering over 148 million people and growing
- No need to search for HotSpots
- Typical speeds of 400 to 700 Kbps — capable of reaching speeds up to 2 Mbps

CALL 1.800.807.8407 NOW.

"Once you start using Verizon Wireless Broadband Access, you can't be without it." Mark Spooner, Editor-in-Chief, LAPTOP magazine.

Get on America's Most Reliable Wireless Broadband Network

VERIZON WIRELESS COMMUNICATIONS STORES

Open Sundays. See store for Return/Exchange Policy.

AUBURN
Finger Lakes Mall
In the Old Post Office
1579 Clark St. Rd.
315-252-5016

BATAVIA
419 W. Main St.
585-345-0919

GREECE
Next to Chuck E. Cheese's
1120 W. Ridge Rd.
585-453-9950

HENRIETTA
240 Greer Ridge Center
585-223-9960

MARKETPLACE
Marketplace Mall
585-475-9085

PITTSFORD
Springhouse Commons
3025 Monroe Ave.
585-342-8866

VICTOR
Cobblestone Court
585-223-9960

WEBSTER
Cobblestone Court
585-223-9960

Visit the Verizon Wireless Stores inside Circuit City and BJ's. Staffed with Verizon Wireless employees.

Visit the Verizon Wireless Stores inside Circuit City and BJ's. Staffed with Verizon Wireless employees.

Visit the Verizon Wireless Stores inside Circuit City and BJ's. Staffed with Verizon Wireless employees.

Visit the Verizon Wireless Stores inside Circuit City and BJ's. Staffed with Verizon Wireless employees.

Visit the Verizon Wireless Stores inside Circuit City and BJ's. Staffed with Verizon Wireless employees.

Visit the Verizon Wireless Stores inside Circuit City and BJ's. Staffed with Verizon Wireless employees.

Visit the Verizon Wireless Stores inside Circuit City and BJ's. Staffed with Verizon Wireless employees.

Visit the Verizon Wireless Stores inside Circuit City and BJ's. Staffed with Verizon Wireless employees.

Visit the Verizon Wireless Stores inside Circuit City and BJ's. Staffed with Verizon Wireless employees.

Visit the Verizon Wireless Stores inside Circuit City and BJ's. Staffed with Verizon Wireless employees.

Visit the Verizon Wireless Stores inside Circuit City and BJ's. Staffed with Verizon Wireless employees.

Visit the Verizon Wireless Stores inside Circuit City and BJ's. Staffed with Verizon Wireless employees.

Visit the Verizon Wireless Stores inside Circuit City and BJ's. Staffed with Verizon Wireless employees.

AUTHORIZED RETAILERS Equipment prices, models, rebates and return policy vary by location. Authorized Retailers may impose additional equipment-related charges, including cancellation fees.

AMERICA'S WIRELESS COMPANY
CANANDAIGUA
585-345-0919

CHRISTIANO CELLULAR GROUP
BATAVIA
585-344-0614

GENESEE
4550 Rt. 63
585-243-9790

DELLEFAVE.COM
MONTICELLO
585-262-6598

FLOWER CITY COMMUNICATIONS
ROCHESTER
585-458-5550

GO WIRELESS
CANANDAIGUA
585-394-8500

ROCHESTER
Rt. 36
585-458-5550

GENEVA
474 Hamilton St.
315-789-4646

PENNY YAN
234 Lake St. Plaza
315-531-9166

MAC-AVE
VICTOR
585-617-0999

OUTLOOK WIRELESS
DANVILLE
585-617-0999

ROCHESTER
3240 Chili Ave.
585-421-6123

WEBSTER
Sunrise Plaza
585-262-6598

THE PC & WIRELESS SHOP
CANANDAIGUA
585-458-5550

SOUTHERN TIER EXPRESS
NUNDA
585-458-5550

WIRELESS WORLD
ALTON
585-458-5550

MACEDON
Macedon Commons
315-986-1200

MAUDON
3793 S. Main St.
315-926-6000

WARSAW
104 N. Main St.
585-786-2950

WEBSTER
807 Ridge Rd.
585-679-9570

X-CELL WIRELESS
WARSAW
585-786-8540

WIRELESS WORLD
NEWARK
585-617-0999

WIRELESS ZONE
DANVILLE
585-617-0999

FAIRPORT
58 Perinton Hills
585-421-6123

GATES
S. Ridge Rd.
585-262-6598

GENEVA
377 Hamilton St.
585-458-5550

IRONDEQUOI
769 E. Ridge Rd.
585-342-1230

ONTARIO
2836 Ridge Rd.
315-524-4440

PENFIELD
Penn-Fair Plaza
585-377-5230

WARSAW
104 N. Main St.
585-786-2950

WEBSTER
807 Ridge Rd.
585-679-9570

X-CELL WIRELESS
WARSAW
585-786-8540

Teamed with



Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless

Verizon Wireless