

# THE POST NEWS GROUP

## Berkeley's First Woman Fire Chief Retires

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### Chief Debra Pryor

By Danielle Savage

Chief Debra Pryor, who made history as the first woman head of the Berkeley Fire Department, is retiring at the end of the month after 20 years in the city's fire service.

She has been fire chief since 2004.

"I was the first woman hired, and I just happened to be African American...there was a lot of ignorance of a woman's capability to doing the work of a fire fighter. I had to overcome that stigma," Pryor recalls.

Pryor was working as a clerk for the city of Berkeley in 1985 when a fire service recruiter caught her interest. Finding a home in the department, she soared through the ranks, which she describes as being "like the military."

According to the city, Chief Pryor is one of three women fire chiefs in California and one of 21 in the nation, and became the second African American fire chief in the country.

"I really had to demonstrate that I could do the job, especially the physical aspects of the job. Women tend to be viewed as having less strength," said Pryor.

Over the years, she won recognition from the International Association of Black Professional Fire Fighters and was awarded the Pioneer Award by the Oakland / Bay Area Chapter of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women.

In 2001, she received a Master's degree in Public Administration from California State East Bay. She has served as president of the Alameda County Training Officers Association and attended the National Fire Academy's Executive Officer Development Programs.

Looking back over her career, she said, "The thing that I'm most proud of is being a product of a community here in Berkeley, being able to serve and give back."

She says she wants to be remembered as "one of [the] authentic public servants."

Pryor looks forward to finding time "to enjoy life and to enjoy retirement." But "when I'm ready," she wants to serve the community by becoming a school teacher.