



2025 Civic Leadership Honoree - Harvey M. Case

Harvey M. Case was born in 1903 in Columbus, Ohio, the eldest son of John and Nora Case. His early years were marked by hard work and responsibility. When his father died of tuberculosis in 1914, the family relocated to Claremont, California, where his mother supported seven children through various jobs. At age fifteen, Harvey moved to Bakersfield to work for a farming family, and by seventeen he was employed at a Yosemite resort doing a variety of jobs, from busboy to boiler-room maintenance. His mechanical aptitude soon earned him a position operating heavy equipment in road construction, where his initiative and problem-solving skills brought him an impressive \$200 a month, a notable wage for that era.

In 1924, Harvey's aunt and uncle invited him to Utah to finish high school at Wasatch Academy. There, he flourished academically and socially, joining the glee club, student government, and even founding a ski club. After graduating in 1928 at age 25, he returned to construction work but maintained a strong sense of discipline and leadership that would later define his law enforcement career. While in Utah, he met Ruth Wall, an elementary school teacher. The two married in 1932, settled in Glendora, and had a daughter, Phyllis, in 1933.

Harvey's path to policing began humbly. While working in the boiler room of a Claremont rock company, he took a second job as a security guard at Scripps College, earning \$90 a month. His responsibility was to protect the students, keeping them safe from "panty raids and burglars." His diligence caught the attention of the Claremont Chief of Police, who offered him a desk clerk position. This role quickly evolved into active police duty. Case soon found himself patrolling Foothill Boulevard in a Model A Ford, where his strong sense of fairness and professionalism stood out. He arrested armed youths without incident and once ticketed the son of a county supervisor, whose father later commended him for his impartiality.

In 1942, at age 38, Case was appointed Chief of Police of La Verne, then a quiet college town with only two other officers. His early years as chief coincided with the pressures of World War II, during which he dealt with everything from local disturbances to wartime emergencies. During this period, he earned a reputation for calm leadership, fairness, and compassion. One story recalls how, when no restaurants were open on Sundays to feed prisoners, he would bring them home to share a family meal. Another incident during the war involved Harvey and Ruth delivering a baby for a woman in need when no doctor was available, a moment that symbolized the couple's deep humanity and service to their community.

In 1945, Case was one of only 100 small-town police chiefs nationwide invited to attend the FBI National Police Academy. There, he studied modern policing methods and, upon returning, implemented major advancements in La Verne, such as a photographic suspect identification system, organized record-keeping, and fingerprint indexing. He also established high professional standards: no drinking, no foul language, and absolute integrity. Officers who failed to uphold these principles were dismissed without hesitation.

Case was also deeply innovative in how he handled youth crime. Rather than punishment, he emphasized counseling and second chances, believing in moral correction over criminalization. His system “one warning, maybe two, but never three” became a local model for juvenile justice reform and was later mirrored by the Los Angeles County Probation Department.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Chief Case modernized the La Verne Police Department. By 1946 it had grown to four full-time officers and a relief, and by 1955 it included seven officers and a full-time desk sergeant. He also founded the Police Reserve and the Mounted Posse, later integrated into Civil Defense, and personally oversaw the training of reserve officers in criminal law, first aid, and marksmanship. These programs reflected his belief that every officer should be well-rounded, trained in everything from law to medicine to physics and that professionalism and compassion must coexist in policing. By the time of his retirement in 1967, the department grew by 17 full-time officers and 17 reserve officers.

Under his direction, the La Verne jail became one of the most efficient and humane facilities in the region. It was fully approved by the state, equipped with two cells, fingerprint and criminal index files, and a two-way radio network linking to Pomona. Even habitual offenders remarked that it was “the nicest jail they’d ever been in,” a reflection of Case’s insistence on dignity and order even in discipline.

Case’s community involvement extended far beyond policing. He was active in the Lions Club, Methodist Church, and local civic groups. His Junior Rifle Safety Club taught youth gun safety, discipline, and respect through weekend retreats and outdoor programs. He often spoke at Bonita High School and La Verne College and employed college students as night desk sergeants, mentoring them through firsthand experience. His leadership inspired deep community respect and he was known as approachable, principled, and fair-minded.

In 1960, Chief Case was named Citizen of the Year by the La Verne Chamber of Commerce for his leadership, youth mentorship, and professional excellence. He retired in 1967 at age 64, after twenty-five years as chief, so his successor could begin fresh in January. Upon retirement, he and Ruth moved to Hillcrest Homes, taking time to revisit Yosemite and Utah, two places deeply tied to their early life together.

Even after retirement, Case continued mentoring youth through the Lions Junior Rifle Club until its closure in 1981. That same year, he was honored in La Verne’s Independence Day Parade and at the dedication of the city’s new Public Safety Building, where his photograph now hangs in tribute to his service.

Chief Harvey M. Case passed away in 1991, remembered as an affable and principled man who viewed policing as an honorable profession, hand-in-hand with ministry. His career embodied fairness, community, and compassion, and his influence helped shape La Verne’s police department into one of integrity and respect — a legacy still visible in the city’s civic spirit today.