

LAW OFFICERS: Local agencies not seeing direct impacts

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as well as the potential effect on law enforcement recruiting and retention.

Sheriff Nelson told *The Nugget*, “First, let me say that we are devastated by the cowardly murders of our family in Dallas and Baton Rouge. But I am so happy that that environment is not the case in this community. I am so humbled and honored to serve the people here.”

Sheriff Nelson noted that following the incidents in Dallas and Baton Rouge local deputies received a flood of well-wishes, cookies, cards and flowers, in support of law enforcement. Nelson said it was an appreciated reminder of the relationship law enforcement enjoys with the local community.

“It’s my job to make sure it stays that way,” he said.

Nelson said that although the killings elsewhere were tragic and shocking, the Deschutes County Sheriff’s Office isn’t changing its patrol tactics or deployment

strategies based specifically on those incidents.

“There are just so many situations,” Nelson said, referring to the unpredictable nature of law enforcement. “We always try to train and prepare for them, and we always have a heightened sense of awareness. If new threats come in we brief on them, share the info, and go to work.

“We have to have the training and experience to handle anything that comes our way,” Nelson said. “We are in the customer-service business, and we have to be able to serve the citizens of our community.”

Nelson noted that, in his opinion, popular media and politicians can stoke the flames of controversy.

“In the case of a deadly use-of-force incident, it is incumbent on law enforcement to be as thorough as possible, and that doesn’t come in a day,” he said. “And it doesn’t help when the office of the president leans toward conclusions before the investigations are even concluded.”

Sheriff Nelson said that while he harbors some long-term “fears about the future

of recruiting and retention because of the national climate,” he feels that the general environment in Central Oregon remains supportive of law enforcement, and therefore law enforcement remains an attractive career option. Nelson told *The Nugget* that he does not anticipate any early retirements from his department solely as a result of the recent violence.

The sheriff told *The Nugget* that he is mindful of the “erosion of respect” experienced by many of those behind the badge.

“A stop by law enforcement is not the time to have a discussion about the procedures deputies are using, or the laws they are enforcing,” he said, noting that “things rarely go poorly when people do as they are instructed.”

The sheriff also said that citizens with complaints can always request a supervisor, make use of the complaint process, or have their legal counsel address an issue, if they feel they have been treated unfairly or improperly.

Black Butte Ranch Police Chief Denney Kelley, who came to Black Butte Ranch after 30 years of experience

with the Portland Police Bureau, also pointed to the media as a problem in high-profile incidents involving police officers. “The fertilizer for a lot of this has been the media,” he said. “And theater by some special-interest groups, and (with the flood of media attention) they gain traction in their message.”

Kelley said that in his experience the swarm of media attention on specific high-profile incidents can contribute to the problem of understanding complex situations, and believes it encourages many to arrive at conclusions “without facts at hand.” Kelley encouraged citizens to become more actively engaged in studying issues, and reading the reports, such as the FBI’s report on the Officer Darren Wilson shooting in Ferguson, Missouri, which is available on the Internet.

Chief Kelley told *The Nugget* he is concerned about the effects of such incidents on law enforcement recruiting.

“We strive to get the right people; these people are smart enough to know other jobs don’t come with the

same problems. The current environment has a dampening effect.”

Kelley said the problem can easily snowball, and that if police academies have a difficult time filling seats due to a lack of applicants, the specter of lowering standards for police recruits can become a serious issue. He pointed to several agencies around the country who are now offering large signing bonuses to entice applicants into a career in law enforcement.

The Nugget asked Kelley if he agreed with Dallas Police Chief David Brown, who told mourners at a memorial service that he believed police departments and officers are being asked to do too much. Kelley said that he agreed, and pointed specifically to “the explosion of mentally ill,” and the utter lack of resources for families and law enforcement to deal with the issues.

Kelley linked the dramatic rise in mental illness to drug and alcohol abuse, and said frankly that “cops don’t have the tools, society doesn’t have the tools, and families don’t have the tools to deal with it.”

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