

POLICE

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who had the job before him, and from Carey Drayton, director of the University's Office of Public Safety, to "resolve some issues before they become issues."

Baker is participating in an ongoing series of "Community Policing Forums," organized by Drayton and Jan Oliver, assistant vice president for institutional affairs.

The meetings are giving OPS and EPD officers a chance to meet with student leaders to discuss some of the issues and problems between law officers and students.

Some of the main concerns students expressed at the first meeting involved what some perceive as police harassment of transients at the corner of 13th Avenue and Kincaid Street and unequal treatment of students of color.

In addition to the forums, Baker said he would like to help organize meetings with officers and students during orientation, so a good relationship is established from the start.

For example, students often complain they are targeted for bicycling tickets, but Baker said he wants people to know bike laws are enforced primarily for rider safety.

"If people are going through a stop sign and get a ticket, that makes a pretty bad first impression," Baker said. "People might think we're picking on bicyclists. They might think they're being set aside as students."

Two meetings have taken place so far and will continue throughout the year. Both Baker and ASUO President Bobby Lee describe the initial meetings as successful and productive.

"(Students) want the same thing we want," Baker said. "They want a greater understanding of how we work, where we're coming from and we want the same."

It's all part of a bigger effort by the Eugene police to move toward community policing practices, where officers are well-known on their beat and citizens feel comfortable approaching and talking to them.

Baker said officers on the campus beat are leading the University's programs like the liaison with the University's fraternities.

"That was community policing. It's working together for an understanding," Baker said. "Instead of I and you, it's we. That intrigued me, and I wanted to get involved."

In years past, 99 percent of the contact people had with police officers was of the enforcement nature, so that was negative contact in their minds, Baker said.

"There's always going to be (enforcement), but we need to focus also on interaction," Baker said. "We need to feel that a uniform is not symbolic of people thinking 'Oh no, here they come, we're going to get pinched,' but 'hey, there's Dennis, there's Ken.'"

"I think that's the direction we're headed — getting students and police officers involved in community."

Ken Saxon, an officer who covers the West University area, is a good example of the difference that can make, Baker said.

"People know him personally and there's been

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— Sgt. Dennis Baker,
EPD University liaison

a reduction in the crime rate in that area," Baker said. "It's not because Ken is Superman down there, but it's the community helping him out."

Baker, along with several other sergeants, requested the job after Cline decided to retire following 32 years on the force, including four on campus. His job is to supervise the four Eugene police officers under contract with the University to oversee the area.

Baker, already an 18-year veteran, expects to be on campus for three to five years — the average for the job. And he anticipates that his work here will give him a headstart in community policing when he moves on to another beat.

Cline's advice to Baker was to make strides right away to understand student issues and make his own concerns known.

Baker said one of the messages he wants to get out is that he and the other officers are around not only to enforce laws but to protect rights.

"We want students to know that they can protest if they want to," Baker said. "In fact, they can come to us and ask us how to do it legally."

Lee commends Baker for approaching the job with that attitude.

"Dennis is going out of his way to meet people," Lee said. "That's what I was looking for. I wanted to have an officer who's very approachable to students."

"The idea is that we want police officers to be part of the community here, and we want students to perceive that," Lee said. "We also want to break stereotypes about each other."

It's especially important now, with relationships between students and the police getting worse, Lee said.

"It's no secret that some walls have gone up on both sides," he said. "But they are a resource, whether we like it or not, and we need to use them to the best advantage."

Drayton also saw the problems escalating and "decided we should pull together before it goes too far," Lee said.

Baker said he wants students to feel comfortable in coming to him with questions about law enforcement on campus, citations or any other issues. He feels that things are moving in a positive direction, but summer is traditionally a quiet time and he'll find out soon enough if the new approach works.

"I feel good about about what we're going to do," Baker said. "But the proof is in the pudding. When it gets down to it, then we'll see if this works."



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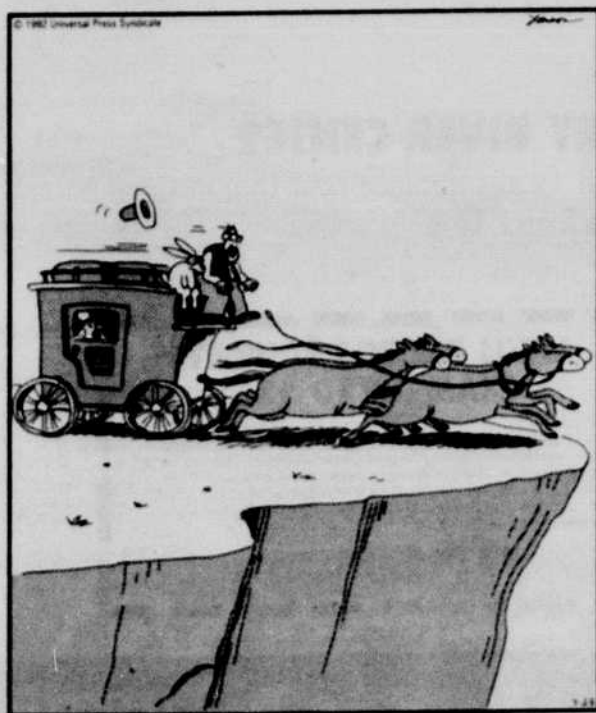
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