

TRACKING HATE AND BIAS CRIMES IN EUGENE

Former Lane County Commissioner candidate Dawn Lesley recently reported a bias incident to the City of Eugene's Human Rights and Neighborhood Involvement office. A friend of Lesley's came to her after seeing swastikas spray-painted on a Trump sign along I-5 in Lane County.

Lesley tells *EW* that she thinks the person who called her, who is a member of the Jewish community, was concerned that it might be an expression of hate. "And it certainly shouldn't be the face of the community to people driving by," Lesley says. "Hatred expressed in any direction is not acceptable."

Although the incident did not target Lesley, she says people have removed political signs from her yard. The signs include one for Black Lives Matter and others for women candidates.

When a hate/bias crime or incident is reported in Eugene, the city's Human Rights and Neighborhood Involvement department works with the Eugene Police Department to document and track reports. However, EPD only tracks crimes, not hate incidents.

In the weeks following Donald Trump's election, HRNI Manager Jennifer Lleras Van Der Haeghen says, "In terms of what's been reported to our office, we've seen steady reporting since the election," adding that she has seen reporting at "a higher rate than normal."

The HRNI office monitors both incidents and crimes and is equipped to handle bias complaints regardless of whether the individual reporting knows if a crime or incident has occurred.

The office has a non-criminal incident reporting process to assist people and keep track of activity like hate-related speech that doesn't necessarily violate any laws, accord-

ing to Van Der Haeghen, such as "those things that are not criminal but, of course, impact how safe and welcomed people feel in our community," she says.

For the last four years, the HRNI has produced the annual "Hate and Bias Report," which contains numbers of hate crimes and noncriminal incidents committed based on sexual orientation, race, disability, mental health, national origin and ethnicity.

In 2015, the Eugene Police Department received reports of 49 hate crimes, compared to 47 hate crimes in 2014. EPD reported that 25 of the 49 hate crimes were "related to race," according to the "Hate and Bias Report," and 20 of those 25 "were committed against African-Americans."

Van Der Haeghen says, "If you asked the average person how many hate crimes happened," 49 is unlikely to be the answer.

When people contact HRNI to report a bias incident, Van Der Haeghen says those reporting are in control of the process. "We ask what their goal is, we take their story down and let them know that we have a report and ask if we can use their story to provide data for the report, and if they agree, then we capture it that way," she says.

After the incident is captured, HRNI can connect the person reporting with appropriate agencies and nonprofits for any support necessary. The office also "coordinates with other community groups to think about what kind of community response would be best — especially when we see trends," she says.

Scott Vinje is a sergeant of a special investigations unit with EPD and works with a team of three other officers to track bias crimes, human trafficking, domestic terrorism and intelligence gathering, and he communicates the number of bias crimes to HRNI.

Vinje reviews all bias crimes and then routes them to the EPD public information officer, the police chief and then to Van Der Haeghen.

"We have a white supremacy group here," Sergeant Vinje says. "As far as going out and seeking out and committing crimes — again compared to other communities — we don't have them going out and victimizing people over and over again."

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center's Active Hate Groups map, an active chapter of the White Nationalist group is located in the Lane County area. Spring-

field resident Jimmy Marr has also made headlines locally for his advocacy of white supremacy.

After the presidential election, the SPLC released "Ten Days After: Harassment and Intimidation in the Aftermath of the Election," which compiled a report of hate incidents across the United States. In Oregon, 33 incidents were reported. The publication documents "hate incident motivation" including anti-woman, anti-black, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-LGBT and anti-Semitism, threats of violence, racial slurs and graffiti spray painted on religious buildings.

"Of the 867 hate incidents collected by the SPLC, 23 were anti-Trump," according to "Ten Days After."

Vinje says he has not noted a big rise in hate crime activity post election. Lt. Jennifer Bills with EPD agrees, saying the numbers do not reflect an increase in hate crimes.

However, EPD doesn't track bias incidents unless they are connected with a crime. Recently, there was a report of three people in a room using derogatory comments towards one individual and another person was assaulted during the same incident, according to Vinje.

Because a crime occurred and hate speech was reported, EPD will forward the information to the HRNI office to include in their annual hate and bias report. Had no assault happened, EPD would not be required to track the derogatory comments.

Van Der Haeghen says all police departments are supposed to track hate and bias crimes. "And what is striking to me is there are local governments of similar size to us or in some cases larger and smaller that are reporting zero to five cases a year, and it's hard to know when we are comparing apples to apples or apples to oranges about what's happening."

She adds that EPD staff training has done well at being able to identify hate and bias crimes.

Although the city and the EPD have an atypical reporting and tracking procedure, the U.S. Department of Justice estimates that only 25 to 42 percent of hate crimes are reported. "We know there are communities who feel less safe going to police departments directly and we are happy to be support for those folks," Van Der Haeghen says.

Vinje adds, "I hope they feel very comfortable coming to us and telling us that they are the victim of a bias crime."

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