



William 'Dub' Lawrence, a former sheriff who established his state's first SWAT team only to see that same unit kill his son-in-law in a controversial standoff 30 years later examines evidence from his investigation. 'Peace Officer,' a documentary about the militarization of police as told through Lawrence's story is now playing at Livingroom Theaters in Portland.

Compelling Focus on Police Tactics

OPINIONATED JUDGE

BY JUDGE
DARLEEN ORTEGA



'Peace Officer' documentary screens in Portland theater

BY DARLEEN ORTEGA

The best film I saw at this year's Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, "Peace Officer," is playing at the Living Room Theater in Portland for what I suspect may be a very limited run. Whether or not you think you are interested in the controversy of police violence and increased

militarization, it's well worth making the time to see this first-rate analysis of the topic while it's in town, or at least to watch for an online release.

I learned at Full Frame that the film's co-directors, Brad Barber and Scott Christopherson (making their first feature film), weren't originally attracted to the subject, but rather to William "Dub" Lawrence, the relentless former Utah sheriff who forms the backbone of the film. Lawrence then led them on his own journey into police militarization, and it would be hard to imagine a more compelling guide into a topic about which focused attention and accountability is hard to come by.

When Lawrence's son-in-law Brian Wood was caught in a police stand-off after assaulting Lawrence's daughter, Lawrence assured Wood's parents that they could trust the police to handle the tense and dangerous situation with care. Then Lawrence watched in horror as Wood was killed by a member of the same SWAT team that Lawrence himself founded back in the 1970s.

For a time Lawrence held onto hope that the police would make sense of what happened. When that didn't happen, he fought to obtain access to the evidence himself and launched his own investigation into what appeared to him to be a homicide. Drawing on decades of experience as a police investigator, Lawrence's painstaking and obsessive inquiry into the incident caused a major shift in his thinking about law enforcement, from trust to alarm.

The film takes us on that journey, as Lawrence helps us sit with the question of how it makes sense for a small army of heavily armed officers to provoke a stand-off with a troubled man who is sitting in his parked truck outside his own home and has threatened only himself with the gun in his hands. Lawrence's growing concern about the increasingly violent responses of police in making arrests and serving warrants using aggressive no-knock search policies lead him to lend his particularly dogged inves-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14