

Police chief proud to answer the call to serve

By **JASON EDMISTON**
Guest commentary

The question why is something I value dearly in our world. We hear why from our children and we hear why from people wanting to seek further enlightenment into their own understanding. We also hear why from those who have done something outside the scope of the norms and/or laws of our society.

But why would anyone want to be a police officer in the society in which we live? Why would anyone want to subject those they love to the challenges faced with the confidentiality of information or the uncertainty of knowing who is friend or foe? Why would someone be willing to walk out the door of their house to do their job full well knowing that may be the last time their loved ones will see them?

Here is my answer: Because there is something incredibly noble about serving the public and for those who believe, there is something incredibly spiritual about being courageous in the face of danger.

I chose to serve because I knew every single day would be different. I chose to serve because I love the community I was born in and have been so blessed to live. I chose to serve because I want my children to live in a community where diversity is endured and compassion reigns.

Does this mean your police department is going to

get it right every single time? No. I have said publicly we are not going to get it right all the time and when we do not, we are going to rely upon those relationships we have established to stand with us and walk us to the other side.

We have made a calculated effort to hire officers who want to live and raise their families here. The average police officer of the Hermiston Police Department has lived in the Hermiston area for 20 years. We have tried to ensure we have a police department that is commensurate of the population in which we serve. Currently, 23 percent of our officers are bilingual in Spanish. When thinking about our Hispanic population approaching 40 percent, I feel comfortable knowing we have several employees that can communicate with a smaller segment (not all of the 40 percent) that is monolingual.

We will make mistakes. We will not put our best foot forward every time. We have to uphold the law, including traffic laws. I have been on the receiving end of a traffic citation and I agree it is not a fun experience. But, we are here to serve and we are here to protect. We are here to foster healthy relationships as we completely understand many woes of society are pushed down to law enforcement to handle.

In November of 2014,

Chief Ed Flynn of the Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Police Department gave a compassionate answer to reporters questioning him about his actions during a public meeting. I would encourage everyone to look Chief Flynn up on the internet and watch the video. Chief Flynn also gave the following response in an article talking about the challenges of law enforcement:

"We are the agency of first resort for the poor for virtually everything," he said, "as well as the agency of first resort for every social problem that no one wants to spend money on anymore. I see the amount of mental health work that we do, but there are no facilities for [persons with mental illness]. I see the amount of work we do with the homeless, but there are insufficient facilities for the homeless. And I see the amount of work

we do with people with substance abuse problems, but there are insufficient treatment centers for substance abuse. I'm beginning to come to the conclusion that society has decided there is no social problem so complicated that it can't be fixed by more training for the police."

I was fortunate this last month to travel abroad (to Europe) with my family. This time away gave me a tremendous opportunity to disconnect from the daily grind (though like many, I checked my emails daily). I met people from around the world who without knowing I was a police officer or prompting the conversation, showed incredible support of the women and men who don and doff the uniform each and every day. In one particular dinner conversation, a Latino couple from the Miami area were

expressing their love of this country and their incredible support of the police. Toward the end of the conversation, my wife let them know I was a police officer. Choking back emotions, I listened as they thanked me. These folks don't know me. I don't "protect" that family in their community. But I do know respect and love is a gift each of us was given and it should never be taken for granted.

Over this last month, individuals and businesses have shown their support for the women and men of the Hermiston Police Department. Cards have been dropped off, food has been dropped off, a billboard south of town shows support for first responders, and words of encouragement have been emailed and texted to me. Humbling to say the least! I have always believed the silent majority is out there

but the incredible compassion and love shown to our department by this community has been amazing and brings that belief to reality.

As the person who is so fortunate to walk side by side with our officers, I want to thank each and every person who has shown their support for the amazing people in our department. Our employees want to do a good job serving and, more importantly, want to go home at the end of each shift. An incredible example of servant leadership was provided to us some 2,000 years ago when feet were washed and sacrifices were made. Each of us is here to serve you.

Thank you Hermiston, we will continue to try and do our best for you.

Jason Edmiston is the chief of police for the Hermiston Police Department.



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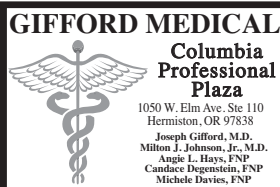
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