

Together We Build

As the police chief in my hometown, I understand the challenges of making Sacramento a city that cherishes and protects the dreams of everyone.

Raised in Oak Park, I joined the Sacramento Police Department at age 19. I love and cherish this community and this police department. To me, they are family.

The challenges of 2018 give us an opportunity to learn and build, and I believe we can accomplish greatness in 2019 if we come together as one community with many different needs.

In our community, as in our country, we are often quick to divide based on superficial characteristics — liberal or conservative, black or white, Democrat or Republican, police officer or community member, to name a few. In reality, we are all in this together. We must work, struggle, learn and grow together to make Sacramento a great place to live for everyone.

As the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. once said: “We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.”

But we cannot ignore history or its impact on today’s relationship between law enforcement and diverse communities throughout our country. In our own city, people lost their lives in several shootings, including officer-involved shootings. In one incident, officers were seriously injured by gunfire.

Even one family mourning the loss of a loved one is tragic. When it happens, we should not only evaluate the specific circumstances of the critical incident, but — together — be accountable for finding ways to prevent similar circumstances in the future.

In 2018, the Sacramento Police Department Communications Center received 631,821 phone calls, a 6 percent increase from the previous year. Police personnel handled 10,999 calls involving mental health-related issues — an 11 percent increase over the previous year. There were 122 gunshot victims and officers seized 927 guns. Officers reported being assaulted or resisted 625 times. For a number of reasons, the number of officers assigned to patrolling our communities has declined from a high of 309 officers in 2011 to a low of 230 officers in 2018.

Despite challenges, there are things we can all be proud of. Homicides declined for the third year in a row. For the first time in at least 35 years, there were no murder victims under the age of 18. Crimes such as robbery and burglary declined 4 percent last year. In my opinion, these decreases are partly due to hard work by our community, police officers and professional staff.

Recently, community leaders and police officers started proactively addressing violent and unsafe actions of some youth in multiple shopping areas in our city. These efforts didn’t eliminate the issues, but they helped. This type of collaboration will be needed in the future, and community-police collaborations like Walk In My Shoes, Day of Service and the Oak Park Peace Walk have already had positive effects.

I could not be prouder of the police officers who endured insults, anger and threats during protests last year. They did their duty with utmost professionalism, protecting both First Amendment rights and

public safety. I am grateful to the many community leaders who stood as a buffer between an angry, hurting community and the police officers who serve us all.

The police department has undergone major changes in the last year, including equipping all officers with body cameras, releasing video footage, adopting a new foot-pursuit policy and creating a division dedicated to training, research and development.

I took the unprecedented step of asking the California attorney general to independently investigate and review an officer-involved shooting. I sought independent reviews of our training, policy and practices from Stanford University, the Center for Policing Equity and the California Department of Justice's Civil Rights Enforcement Section.

There is hard work ahead, but I know together we can build a police department and community that works for everyone. I know "othering" does not accomplish this, and that only by doing the challenging work together will we become what we all need to thrive.

I believe Sacramento can come together as a community that serves everyone because that's the kind of community I witnessed growing up in the presence of my mother in Oak Park.

I, for one, will be giving everything I have to build the Sacramento we all deserve. I welcome all of Sacramento to join myself and community leaders who believe that only together can we build.

For more information on programs and statistics mentioned in this Op Ed, go to <http://www.cityofsacramento.org/Police>

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