

PEERING BEHIND THE BADGE

One morning several years ago, when my son Alex was in the fifth grade, he asked me what I did at work. Mistakenly, I thought he was asking what I did for a living. I was surprised because we had discussed my job many times. When I expressed my surprise he said "Dad ... I KNOW you're a policeman. Duh! What I want to know is EXACTLY what you do at work! We're discussing jobs in class and I have to tell everyone what my dad does."

Relieved that he had been paying attention to at least some of what I had said over the years, I examined the calendar in my trusty/hated Blackberry, and explained one of my typical days. "Well, today's pretty common," I said. "I have a meeting with a community leader, then I have a meeting with the Deputy Chief and then a meeting with the City Manager. During lunch I have a meeting with someone with whom we're working on a community project. After lunch, I have a meeting with two officers and a final meeting with the City Attorney at the end of the day."

Proud that I was able to accurately provide my wonderful child with the information he needed to fulfill his educational objective for the day, I gazed at Alex, expecting an impressed and appreciative response like "Gee, Dad, I didn't realize you did such important things at work. I'm really proud of you. Thanks so much for helping me achieve my educational objective for the day. You're the greatest Dad ever. In the entire world. In all of history!"

Instead, my fantastic kid (he really is) looked at me with what I can only describe as confused disappointment (kinda the same look I get when I tell my wife where we're going on one of our rare "parents' nights out"). Confused myself, I said "What's wrong?" Alex replied, "Dad ... I can't tell my class that's what you do at work! ... NOBODY has a job where all they do is go to meetings all day! I'm gonna be so embarrassed! Don't you do ANYTHING else?"

Fortunately, I was able to expound on my typical work day so my kid had something more exciting to tell his class (OK, so maybe I don't actually catch bank robbers, chase car thieves or solve murder cases EVERY DAY at work ... but it COULD happen ... sorry, Alex!).

This endearing, memorable exchange with Alex helped me realize that if my own kid didn't fully understand what his dad actually did to try and make Redlands safe, then perhaps the citizens of Redlands might be similarly unaware of exactly what the members of the Redlands Police Department do to keep them safe.

After some discussion with the RPD staff, *Behind the Badge*, our community initiative to de-mystify what the RPD does, was born.

I deeply believe that a healthy, responsive police department is one that is largely transparent in its intent and crime-fighting strategies. Such a department is one that expends substantial effort at trying to open itself up to its "owners," which are, in our case, you – the people of Redlands.

For many years the RPD has been trying to ensure that only those police activities that by their nature must be secret (e.g. undercover investigations, victims' identities, etc.) are kept from the public. This column is an example of how I try and explain what we do. So is our recently formed *Citizen Privacy Council*. But I think we can do a better job.

The advent of technologies such as the Internet, low-cost video production and the increasingly popular “podcast,” (the modern-day computer version of radio programs) has provided us with an entirely new avenue for providing “on-demand” explanations of what we do to enhance public safety, why we do it, and, importantly, how we spend your tax dollars and why safety services cost what they do.

Behind the Badge is our far-reaching organizational effort to reach you in a variety of venues to inform you, perhaps entertain you a bit and hopefully provide a vehicle by which you can inform us as to whether or not we are providing you the level of service you want.

Our website (www.redlandspolice.org) has podcasts you can download. So does *iTunes*, the popular audio player (get it free for Macintosh or PC computers at www.apple.com/downloads/). To get our podcasts from *iTunes* simply go to the “iTunes Store,” click on “Podcasts” and type *Behind the Badge* in the search field (no italics). The value of podcasts is that, unlike radio programs, you can listen to them at your convenience because they sit on a website until you choose to download and listen to them.

Our podcasts are both audio and video in nature. We are posting audio versions of our more important press releases. The audio version of this column is also posted. Short videos of our “Pet of the Week” animal adoption program at the Redlands Animal Shelter are also found there. Shortly, we will also be posting police radio traffic from exciting police incidents such as in-progress calls and pursuits.

In addition, we plan to host live “webcast” panel discussions of pressing community safety issues on the site. With these, the entire community can participate from home, office or WiFi locations by emailing questions to the presenters who will read them and address the question or issue posed. All you’ll need is a computer with relatively quick connection to the Internet. Eventually, we will also webcast the City Council meetings for your convenience.

Lately, as the political season begins to heat up, there has been increasing commentary regarding the cost of providing city services. Like my son’s lack of understanding what his dad does every day at work, I believe many people in Redlands simply do not understand the quality of public safety services they are receiving for their tax dollars. If they understood exactly what the dedicated professionals at the Redlands Fire and Police departments do to keep them safe – every day – I believe they would have a much better appreciation of why it costs what it does to keep Redlands safe.

Maybe, just maybe, if we can provide the public safety pundits of our community adequate opportunities to understand that which they criticize, they will focus their dialogue on maintaining the safe community we have. It doesn’t take much skill to simply cut items from a city budget without regard for the ramifications of such actions. To do so in a manner that does not jeopardize the safety of the people that live here takes experience, knowledge and the wisdom to consult the people who have dedicated their professional lives to protecting the public.

If you have any questions or comments please contact me at chief@redlandspolice.org or 909-335-4744 – and don’t forget to visit our website at www.redlandspolice.org.