

## **Culture of Peace: Ashland police department partners for peace**

**By Tighe O'Meara**

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When I was approached to consider becoming a member of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission (ACPC), I was not certain what I was getting myself into. I was, and still am, sure that if American law enforcement is going to improve its relationship with the national community, we have to engage with all members of the public in a meaningful way.

With that in mind, I took a leap of faith and joined the group. I discovered a diverse group of community members who are striving for something great. I found people “dedicated to transforming our attitudes, behaviors, and institutions into ones that foster harmonious relationships with each other and the natural world.”

In recent years we have seen several large-scale, national movements and events play out before our eyes. We have watched as the occupy movements developed with varying results in different communities. We have watched as Ferguson unfolded like a bad dream before our eyes, as well as all of the subsequent incidents that have cast a shadow on our national community’s relationship with law enforcement.

I have observed a theme throughout all of these events: Police departments that have established open, honest relationships before major incidents occur have a much better chance of navigating and finding some peace during and after the event. This is why I took the leap of faith, and this is why I have made community engagement one of my top priorities.

We also need to recognize that something very productive has come out of this, something that can make us stronger and better than we were before it all happened. We are starting to see that we, as a nation, are not beyond prejudice

and bias. Prior to 2014, many of us, including me, were operating under the illusion that we were in control, and that, by golly, I'm not prejudiced!

Well, folks, it's time for a wakeup call. We may not be explicitly prejudiced, but all of us are biased in one way or another. All of us are subjected to unconscious programming that has an impact on the opinions we form and the decisions we make.

I acknowledge that this is not the answer, but it is the first step toward an answer. I am excited that our police department has been training in the fascinating field of implicit bias. The next step is to also explore procedural justice, which, in a big way, is what the ACPC is all about.

Procedural justice doesn't mean that every person gets his or her way. It means that every person gets respect, dignity, and is allowed to have his or her voice heard. That is how I see the Ashland Culture of Peace movement — respecting all members of the community, allowing them their dignity, and allowing them to be heard.

The Ashland Police Department values the lives of all members of our community. We have embraced several new programs that have allowed us to stay focused on being peace officers and not warriors:

- The department has redefined how sexual assaults are investigated, leaving the survivor in control.
- We have embraced a drug amnesty program that allows addicts to turn in their drugs and receive treatment instead of a criminal charge.
- We have deployed an anti-opioid drug that can save the lives of members of the community who are suffering from an overdose.
- We are embracing a system of fair and impartial policing that is based on implicit bias studies.

Just as recognizing that biases exist, by itself, is not an answer, none of these programs is an answer in and of itself. However, each is a good step toward addressing an important issue. And, each is an important way that your police department can stay engaged with the community in a meaningful way.

I see programs like these, and engagement with groups like the ACPC, as important steps toward re-building our relationship with the community. This is a way that the police department can be partners in creating harmonious relationships and a culture of peace in our community.

*Ashland Chief of Police Tighe O'Meara is a member of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission. Send comments and questions to the commission at [ashlandcpc@gmail.com](mailto:ashlandcpc@gmail.com), drop by the commission office at 33 1st St., Suite 1, and like the commission on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission](http://www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission).*



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