

Kudos to the Danville PD for openness - News & Advance, The (Lynchburg, VA) - April 13, 2018

April 13, 2018 | News & Advance, The (Lynchburg, VA) | Staff Writer

These days, trust in public institutions is at all-time lows. If only the Pentagon and President Lyndon Johnson had been truthful about what was happening on the ground in Vietnam. If only President Richard Nixon had just immediately 'fessed up the third rate burglary that was Watergate instead of trying to cover it up. If only Facebook and Mark Zuckerberg were straightforward with its 2 billion users about what the company did with their personal data.

If only. The one thing common to all these scenarios is a lack of transparency with the public.

Our neighbors to the south in Danville have a police department and a chief keenly aware of how important public transparency is for law enforcement agencies.

Since January, Chief Scott Booth has handled two fatal, officer-involved shootings, and done so in an exemplary manner.

On Jan. 7 and on April 8, Danville police officers responded to two 9-1-1 calls from women reporting serious threats of domestic violence. In the Jan. 7 incident, officers arrived at the home and, after calling on the man to come out, were greeted with a volley of gunfire. The officer returned fire, killing the man. On April 8, in another domestic call, officers arrived on the scene and saw the female caller in a car with **Juan Markee Jones**. After telling him to exit the vehicle, instead he drove off, getting out of his car at the end of the cul-de-sac and turning suddenly toward officers, who fatally shot him, believing he had a gun.

Within three days of the Jan. 7 incident, Chief Booth released the name of the officer who fired the fatal shots, revealing him to be a veteran law enforcement officer with a spotless record. Within two days of the April 8 shooting, Booth released bodycam footage; one day later, he released the names of the two officers involved.

Contrast how the Lynchburg Police Department handles officer-involved shootings, and you'll see a vastly different approach.

It has been 55 days since Lynchburg Police Department officers driving down Link Road noticed a home's front door partially open at 1:15 a.m. on a Saturday morning, stopped and wound up shooting the homeowner in the leg. And it has been 158 days since LPD officers shot and killed a suicidal, knife-wielding woman on Triangle Place after an hours-long standoff.

Fifty-five days and 158 days, respectively, of silence from the LPD as to exactly what happened, who the officers involved in the shooting were and whether body-cam footage of the incidents exists.

That simply is unacceptable. In both cases, the Virginia State Police is conducting an investigation and special prosecutors have been appointed to handle them. (Virginia Beach for the Triangle Place killing and Alexandria for the Link Road shooting). And in both cases, precious little information has been forthcoming from LPD.

Citing the probe, city leadership will not divulge any additional information, including the names of the officers involved, their service records or what may be available through body-cam footage. We understand and support the need for an outside investigation, as well as the need to withhold some details until it's complete. But we part ways with city leadership to shut information down completely.

We believe it is in the city's best interest to have law enforcement that is open and transparent with the public it serves. We support the approach in Danville, and urge LPD Chief Rau IDiaz and city leadership to also opt for transparency: Release the officers' names and service histories. Openness and trust go hand in hand.

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