

Letter from Task Force Chiefs and Sheriffs

As residents of Northern Colorado, when we hear about random acts of violence, we generally expect them to be occurring somewhere else, not in our communities. We know that we are blessed to live in a low crime area where we typically worry more about recreational accidents or weather hazards than we do violent crimes.

Because of that reality, the fact that we've had three apparently random shootings occur in our backyard, the Northern Colorado community is understandably concerned. As the Chiefs and the Sheriffs representing the jurisdictions directly impacted by these three crimes, we wanted to speak directly to the community.

We are affected by these incidents, not only professionally, but personally as well. Between the four of us, we have approximately 120 years of law enforcement service with our communities. Northern Colorado is our home and we also place a high value on our area remaining a safe place to live, work, and play.

As the three separate shootings occurred, we quickly joined forces to conduct these investigations. While our two counties combined represent almost 600,000 residents, we still maintain very tight working relationships between our agencies, meeting as chiefs at least monthly to discuss issues of mutual concern. In doing that, we have established very solid, personal working relationships as well.

Northern Colorado is fortunate to also have an FBI resident office located in Loveland so that we communicate and interact regularly with the FBI personnel working in our area.

When the first reported shooting came to the Larimer County Sheriff's Office in April, we recognized that the situation was a highly unusual occurrence for our area and we immediately assigned a team of investigators to work the case.

By the time the Windsor shooting occurred some weeks later in May, both Larimer County and Windsor recognized there was a strong possibility the two incidents were potentially related and we began sharing information immediately. At the same time, we placed a request through the FBI's resident office for their investigative assistance. We were immediately assured through the FBI Denver Field Office that they would provide any assets and assistance we might need.

Within days, based on the evidence collected and reviewed to date, we concluded that the two shootings were connected. At that point, it was mutually decided that restructuring our management of the investigation would provide the best framework for leading the investigation, while making sure we were not duplicating efforts.

In early June, the city of Loveland had another apparently random shooting occur in their community. While the Loveland case was immediately rolled into the task force, at this time, we

cannot conclusively say whether this shooting is related or not. We continue to methodically review all evidence from this incident.

The task force includes several different agencies, providing a large variety of personnel, technical expertise and specialized investigative tools. During a normal investigation, we might very likely outline the numbers and types of resources being used, however with the unique nature of this investigation we have concluded that revealing those kinds of specific details could be counterproductive to expeditiously solving these cases.

We can tell you that the major players in the task force include the police departments from the cities of Windsor and Loveland as well as both the Larimer and Weld County Sheriff's and District Attorney's Offices and obviously many resources from the FBI. A handful of other agencies are participating at different levels, but we won't be naming those agencies at this time.

At any given time, there may be investigators active in the field, staff monitoring tip lines, analysts reviewing data that has been compiled, technicians preparing reports, lab personnel analyzing evidence, prosecutors reviewing warrant applications, commanders adjusting strategies, officers on the street looking for suspicious activity, or any number of other experts providing their specialized expertise.

As the chiefs of our respective agencies, we participate in as many of the daily briefings as possible to make sure that we remain up to speed on the critical details of the investigation to assure that we are doing everything possible to provide the best protection possible to our communities.

While you are not hearing or reading specific details, we can attest that an amazing amount of investigative work continues to be done and the task force shows an amazing level of dedication and resilience. Being a part of these daily recaps, we know personally just how much is being done not only to identify possible suspects, but also just as importantly, to eliminate potential suspects.

It is a very tedious process, sorting through evidence and leads to establish proven facts. We know there are a variety of pundits with varying degrees of experience who are speculating on the case based on what they have read, heard or seen in the media. While the task force doesn't have all the answers we need yet, we do know definitively that they have monumentally more facts on the cases than those who are publicly speculating. And the task force moves forward from the lessons learned in previous serial shooting cases.

We can tell you that there are many working theories being looked at. We keep all the options open until the facts disprove a theory or positively eliminate a suspect or person of interest. Hunches and theories are good, but facts and evidence are what we use to assemble our cases.

One of the reasons the task force has been cautious about releasing information like vehicle descriptions is because we know that misinterpreted information can not only be damaging to solving the case, but it can also be dangerous to the community.

For example, after other methods were unsuccessful at locating the driver of a white Ford Explorer that was in the area around the time of John Jacoby's shooting, we put out a request for anyone with information on that possible vehicle to contact us. We made it as clear as possible that this driver was not considered a suspect, but just someone we needed to identify and speak with. However, within hours, some media sources began stating that this was our suspect. Because of that, we spoke with several citizens who were scared to call and scared to drive their white Ford Explorers in Northern Colorado because of the reports of that style of vehicle being the suspect vehicle.

We can assure you that the chiefs and the task force investigators have very vigorous debates about when and how to release certain details. Everyone is quite open to express their views and opinions and they do. That debate serves to assure that we do not get stuck in a rut on how the investigation is being led.

Because of the level of continual activity of the task force, we recently made the decision to relocate all task force personnel from the Windsor Police building to its own site. That way, the Windsor Police personnel can continue to focus on all their other duties and also so the task force can operate in the most conducive environment.

Additionally, this sharing of resources assures that each of our agencies is able to maintain focus on the day to day cases that we are responsible for thoroughly investigating.

Since these investigations began, we've also received what seems like an unusual series of reports of broken or shattered windows on vehicles throughout the region. To date, we have found no solid evidence that any of these incidents are related to our shootings. However, to be sure, we have assigned a work group at the task force to review any and all of these types of incidents that are being reported.

Not only have we not found physical evidence tying them together, but the circumstances are showing no distinguishable patterns. Again, we are not in a position to give too many details, but so far it seems most likely that these are being caused by road debris. However, we routinely hear these incidents reported as shootings.

Because of the attention to broken windows, we have received a handful of reports, not only from local residents, but also from people around the country who traveled through our region, years or months earlier who report having experienced shattered car windows. Those reports, along with information from auto glass replacement shops seems to indicate that the incidents may not be any more frequent, it's more that drivers are understandably more likely to make a

police report when they occur in our area because of the three shooting cases being investigated by the task force.

Again, we'll continue to follow the evidence and the facts.

As your entrusted law enforcement leaders, we want you to know of our firm resolve to maintain an intense engagement in these investigations until the problem is stopped and justice is served upon anyone involved. We will keep you as informed as we possibly can; and in turn we will continue to seek the assistance of anyone who may possess information that may help us solve these crimes. If you believe you have information that we should know about, please call the task force tip line at 970-498-5595, or send an email to taskforce@larimer.org

We close by sharing our benevolence with you.

Windsor Police Chief John Michaels

Loveland Police Chief Luke Hecker

Larimer County Sheriff Justin Smith

Weld County Sheriff Steve Reams