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**ST. CHARLES COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

**Campus Police Outreach Task Force**

**Friday – March 5th, 2021 at 2:30pm**

**Meeting via Zoom Conference**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Present:** Jeff Drake (Chair) Campus Police

Bob Ronkoski Campus Police Chief

Brandon Misher Campus Police

Byron “Sarge” Watson Guest Speaker

Robert Jones Student Life

Todd Galbierz VP – Administrative Services

Heather McDorman VP – Mktg. & Student Life

Betsy Schneider Exec. Dir. & Special Asst.

Jacqueline White Learning Specialist

Mary Ann Neal Disability Support Services

Keith Kolander Adaptive Technology

Charlene Jones Div. Office Coordinator

Gail Voss PB AEL Instructor

Mark Ireton Tier 2 Tech Support

Cindy Mulford Campus Police

Tom Forgue Campus Police

Reid Clark Campus Police

Ben Rouggly Campus Police

John Kreith Campus Police

Abigail James Student

1. **Welcome to the Group**  **Bob Ronkoski**

* Chief Bob Ronkoski welcomed everyone to the meeting, featuring the first in a series of public speakers for the Campus Police Outreach Task Force.

1. **Introduction of Guest Speaker Jeff Drake**

* Jeff Drake introduced guest speaker Byron “Sarge” Watson, former police officer and retired Sergeant from St. Louis County Police Department, now a volunteer Police Chaplain for the department.

1. **Guest Speaker Byron Watson**

* Byron Watson spoke to the group about his experiences through his 4-decade police career. He focused on several things, including his thoughts on community policing, with an emphasis on the importance of community engagement with the police – he referenced the following as one of his guiding philosophies for police officers:

"It takes a village to raise a child" is an African proverb that means that an entire community of people must interact with children for those children to experience and grow in a safe and healthy environment. Byron recounted his childhood with neighborhood parents and local police officers who mentored him and took an active role in helping raise him, which is something missing from our neighborhoods today.

* He spoke about the rising numbers of people with untreated mental health issues in the community, and that police officers are receiving Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training to help officers deal with trauma, mental illness and drug abuse on duty. He felt more preventative mental health treatment could reduce the number of cases involving police intervention with people in crisis and thus reduce the number of use-of-force injuries and deaths.
* Byron discussed his experiences as a black police officer, with both the public and within the police department structure. He cited some disrespect in the black community toward black officers due to perceptions and social history, and also from the general community a tendency to automatically treat white police officers on the scene of an incident as being the ones in charge, whether they were or not. He noted the problems most police departments are experiencing in attracting people of color to become police officers.
* Byron explained that he had been chosen by Governor Jay Nixon to serve on the Ferguson Commission, which is defined as follows:

The Ferguson Commission is an independent group appointed by Missouri Governor Jay Nixon on November 18, 2014, to conduct a “thorough, wide-ranging and unflinching study of the social and economic conditions that impede progress, equality and safety in the St. Louis region.” The need to address these conditions was underscored by the unrest in the wake of the death of Michael Brown, Jr. in Ferguson on August 9, 2014.

During his work with the commission, Byron collaborated on the production of a short video called, “Why Did You Pull Me Over?” He then showed the video to the group, which featured Byron explaining how he and his wife were pulled over a few years ago by a white police officer who refused to explain why he was stopped, and only began to explain himself after Byron identified himself as a police officer himself. He did not know for sure why he was stopped, but he said he assumed it was probably to see if he had any warrants or a suspended driver license, and not for any violation of the traffic laws. Byron ended the video with his belief that police officers should treat everyone as they would want to be treated themselves.

1. **Questions and Answers: Byron Watson**

Byron took questions from the group.

* Jeff Drake asked how many hours a week he typically worked as a chaplain. He said average of about 35 – 40 hours and he doesn’t get paid. He said he’s the most popular police chaplain at St. Louis County Police, and that out of about 32 chaplains he probably works more hours than the rest combined.
* Todd Galbierz asked if he thought the behavior of the officer from Byron’s video was due more to a departmental culture or the officer’s individual approach. Byron said it is difficult to tell because you can’t teach morals. He added that one of the problems with situations that get out of control like the officer kneeling on George Floyd’s neck was the officers that did nothing to intervene, and he felt if more officers intervened with a fellow officer acting out of bounds, they could stop the officer from throwing away his career and possibly facing prison over losing his composure.
* Todd Galbierz asked for Byron’s opinion on body cameras for police officers. Byron said that he thought these cameras were pretty much here to stay, and that they actually help cause both officers and citizens to behave better. He also said he felt in his experience the body cameras exonerated the officers more often than they convicted them.
* Ben Rouggly asked what aspects of community policing he thought should be taught to officers. Byron answered “implicit bias”, which is a learned thought process that causes someone to have pre-conceived opinions about other cultures or races based on what they were taught in their upbringing.
* Brandon Misher asked how many St. Louis County officers were CIT trained. Byron said approximately 500 of the current 900 officers have the training, but as with most of these training courses it comes down to money. While in training the officers are not working the street but they still get paid.
* Bob Ronkoski told Byron that our officers are 100% CIT trained as soon as the classes become available. Byron said that was fantastic and that our department was way ahead of the curve, and that when he worked for St. Louis Community College he thinks that he was the only CIT trained officer. Byron said it’s bad enough to have to get physical and arrest a member of the general public who is experiencing a mental health crisis, but you never want to arrest a student at your college if there’s any way to avoid it, and CIT training helps officers handle these situations better and hopefully without any physical force needed.
* Bob also noted that while he was on the Board of Directors of the Eastern Missouri Police Academy, they established CIT Training as part of the curriculum for police recruit training at the Academy.
* Robert Jones typed in the chatroom that he would like to see our children being taught about implicit bias in school before they develop the associated mentalities. Byron agreed and said it is definitely a learned thing. He used the example of a white baby and a black baby in a crib who play together, and that it is only the interference from we adults that causes them to even realize they’re different from one another.
* Brandon Misher advised the group that our next guest speaker would be on Friday April 23rd at 2:30pm, and that his name is Kyle Dooley. He is Director of CIT Community Policing Programs for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and he will speak to the group about CIT training for police officers and the different types of crisis situations officers face when handling calls for service.

1. **Closing Comments Jeff Drake**

* With no additional questions from the group, Jeff closed out the meeting and thanked Byron “Sarge” Watson for speaking and sharing his insights into police officers and the importance of good training, a community approach, and ongoing education. Jeff told Byron that he would send him an invite to the April 23rd Zoom meeting with Kyle Dooley and he said please do, and he would be pleased to speak to our group in the future.

**The next meeting of the Campus Police Outreach Task Force will be on**

**Friday March 12th, 2021 at 2:30pm via Zoom.**