

Mayor's Column
June 29, 2015

Last week the Trustees and I reacted to an incident occurring at the very end of the beautiful high school graduation festivities.

The unacceptable behavior was directed at our police and frankly its importance was not how many chanted or who else heard it, rather that our police officers in cars at both the beginning and end of the parade heard it. That was enough. Not angry, but frankly stunned and disheartened, they reported it to Chief Satriale who reached out to the Board of Trustees for a show of support. That was an easy decision as our officers are so deserving of our backing. We also didn't have to look very far to see what can happen to the fabric of a community when elected officials don't back up the fine men and women in blue.

What followed was a tough week, but upon reflection a week of real value. Conversations were held in homes discussing the dignity and honor of everyone's job – how words can often be as profoundly hurtful as physical attacks, and the need to speak up when you disagree with another's behavior. A community conversation was started that was sincere, positive and productive. Just another reason why this Village is such a special home.

It's not easy being a police officer in Bronxville. So much is expected of them. As to the treatment of our youth, they walk a very fine line and often employ a great deal of discretion. In more cases than not, young people are sent or driven home or parents called to come to Village Hall in lieu of the Judge. Our officers are focused on teaching life lessons, not ruining futures. When our children leave our Village, the police world is quite different and less forgiving. We are not the norm.

Last week's incident struck a particular nerve as our department is currently so very young and new. With this new energy our Chief has redoubled efforts to have our officers make a concerted effort to connect with our young people in various non-adversarial situations.

Chief Satriale has hired 16 of the 19 officers on the current force just since he took over leadership in 2007. A record eight officers have been trained as Certified Youth Officers. Three officers now live in nearby Eastchester and as a result of their proximity, attend many Village youth events while off duty. One of our newest officers now volunteers as a 4th Grade lacrosse team Coach.

Though we thought we had been quite careful not to use a broad brush when referring to those involved in the chanting, I reiterate that we know only a small minority of the 113 graduates participated.

Bottom line, our message was that no matter the number of participants, we are all diminished by this type of behavior. Frankly, it would have been far easier to just let the moment go by. But Bronxville has high standards, high expectations of behavior that we must preserve and hold dear. Our level of civility in public discourse is admired by many.

But just as it is important to point out unacceptable behavior, it is even more important to acknowledge the swift and adult response that was received at the Police Department from the Senior Class leadership.

Representatives hand delivered an incredibly sincere, heartfelt, thought filled letter to Chief Satriale and the Class President will be meeting with the Chief next week. This display of character by these young leaders will serve them well in life's next chapter. The police department also received letters from students clearly not involved

who just felt badly. As yet, no one admitting to participation has offered an apology but that, too, is a life lesson I guess.

I truly believe this incident could end up strengthening the bonds between our young people and our police officers. The more we interact the more we humanize our relationships. For example, when you see Officer Lauralee Ulrich be comforted to know she is a certified EMT. She actually saved the life of a gentleman who had a heart attack right outside of Lange's. Sergeant Anderson was a talented high school kicker and is more often than not on the Bronco football sidelines. When you see Officer Dentini, you'll know he is a bodybuilder and lover of all things athletic. Our force is so young and physically fit that ten members have trained and qualified for bike patrol. Sergeant Van der Leew is an accomplished bagpiper who competes at the highest levels internationally but still joins our Parade! One of our most senior officers Dennis Karraman is an avid fisherman.

Our Police Officers are good people. Our young people are good people. To the Class of 2015 and all future classes, you are the Village's finest asset, the hope of the future and our most cherished natural resource. You comprise over one half of the Bronxville population and bring great joy and energy to our Village.

I wish you happiness and fulfillment as you write a new chapter in the book of life and always know you have a warm and embracing home in Bronxville where people care for you deeply.