



# A NEW

by Joe Clure  
PLEA President

As a sophomore at Trevor G. Brown High School in 1975-76, I knew that I wanted to be a police officer. I can remember the news accounts at the time talking about whether or not Phoenix Police Officers would go on strike over pay and benefits. In 1982, after finishing high school and doing a tour in the Army, I graduated from the Phoenix Police Academy. The Phoenix Law Enforcement Association had been formed a short seven years prior (1975). Ruben Ortega was the Police Chief at that time. During those years, the Phoenix Police Department was looked upon with high regard as far as police agencies went and almost everyone on the department was very proud to be a Phoenix Police Officer. That isn't to say that there weren't struggles. PLEA was involved in a bitter battle with Chief Ortega over a variety of working conditions and disciplinary issues as well as retaliation against Association leaders. Many of those early leaders paid dearly not only professionally, but personally for stepping up to the plate and walking point. PLEA President Gordon Lange was charged criminally on bogus trumped up felony charges. The department fired him. Ultimately ALL charges against him were dismissed and his job was reinstated by the civil service board. Gordy, having been out of work for almost a year, had to take a job working as a custodian for a time to make ends meet and put food on the table. Joe Petrosino was another early board member who, solely because of his out spoken criticism of the chief's leadership on behalf of the members, was denied a promotion to sergeant. In fact, one of the very first things I did as a new Association member was to sign a vote of no confidence against the chief; arguably not the smartest thing since I was still on probation.

After those difficult and contentious times a new police chief named Dennis Garrett took the helm in 1991. Chief Garrett's tenure as Police Chief happened to coincide with the time that PLEA President Mike Petchel served the Association from 1983-1997. This was a time of partnership and cooperation between PLEA and management forged on a foundation of mutual respect and trust that lasted for about seven years. This was, in my opinion, the "golden age" of police labor relations within the Phoenix Police Department. There were annual Labor/Management retreats with the entire PLEA Board and Chiefs. Some Commanders who just didn't understand or didn't want to understand the new relationship were specially invited in the hopes that they would be able to understand and embrace this new dynamic.

Since then, we have had two other Police Chiefs, Harold Hurtt and Jack Harris and four PLEA Presidents, Terry Sills, Ron Snodgrass, Jake Jacobsen, and Mark Spencer. Relationships between those PLEA Presidents and Police Chiefs varied widely from good, to mediocre, to non-existent, to downright adversarial. Having worked under all of those PLEA Presidents, I can attest that each one had whatever relationship they had with the Police Chief at the time because they felt it was what was needed and in the best interest of the membership at that point in history. As the saying goes, "it takes two to tango" and I'm sure that during these years some of these chiefs by their own choice, had minimal to no interest in having a relationship with the police union. Far from being

completely independent decision makers, each PLEA President has a board they must answer to that provides guidance and accountability for their decision making process.

I believe most would agree over the years since the Garrett/Petchel era that mutual respect and trust between PLEA and police management has deteriorated greatly. Why? There are many potential factors; tough economic times have undoubtedly contributed to the strained relationship. Tougher economic times forced us to have to confront the very real threat of layoffs just three years ago. Not hiring new officers for the past three years with no new hires projected until 2015 has put stresses and strains on the organization that we have never had to deal with until now.

The department for the last several years has preached and advocated a philosophy of enlightened leadership. Unfortunately, most officers and many supervisors see enlightened leadership as a sham; a concept that many pay lip service to but don't truly believe in. Maybe some on both sides feel it's just a lot harder to work together than to just do your own thing. I'm sure many police managers probably feel that it's just a lot easier to manage without that "damn union" in the way. As an Association leader, it's easy

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to sometimes automatically assign blame to police management when things don't go well. The rapidly evolving changes in technology are also a contributing factor. When I came on, having a pager, a one way communications device, was about as high tech as things got. Today, we have the internet, websites, Facebook, Twitter, and blogs, all instant and sometimes anonymous worldwide communication. When I first started this job almost ALL of the police department's internal business was just that, internal, there were no blogs to post on and it seemed that only the biggest of internal investigations ever made the news. Today, if there is discontent amongst the troops, individual officers have the power in the palm of their hand to broadcast their views and feelings to the world. The bigger question is: Why do so many officers seem so willing to communicate negative information outside the police department? I believe it is a direct reflection of the frustration officers feel regarding the lack of effective police leadership over the past few years. When officers are forced to work under a double standard and see supervisors get special treatment it creates an environment where they are all too willing to go outside normal channels for their voices to be heard. It is also what has led to the deterioration of the relationship between PLEA and police management. Phoenix Police Officers have been without

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effective leadership for the last five years and are starved for effective leadership and organizational direction from the top cop.

Apparently, the City of Phoenix also sees the need for effective leadership. For the first time in the organization's history, the Phoenix Police Department will be led by a candidate selected from outside the internal PD ranks. Daniel Garcia, an Assistant Police Chief from Dallas, Texas was ultimately selected for the Chief's job. Despite the fact that there were qualified internal candidates for the job, the city elected to get a "fresh set of eyes" on the police department. How will it work out? I don't know as this will be new territory for all of us. PLEA has heard good things about him from the Dallas Police Association President, Ron Pinkston. The Dallas Police Union has had nothing but good things to say about Chief Garcia. They indicated they would have liked to have him for their chief. This is probably the best endorsement a prospective police chief candidate could receive.

While many things may be uncertain at this point in time, "we" collectively, are at the proverbial fork in the road. We can work together to restore the reputation and improve as a department or

suffer from not doing so. One thing is certain, if the police department is not successful, and if we aren't able to earn the full faith, confidence, and support of the citizens we serve, we will never reach our full potential as a police department, a labor representation organization, or individual members. I believe this is the challenge and responsibility the new chief, and I as the Association president, must strive to accomplish in order to be successful.

So what does the future hold? Only time will tell as they say, but for my part as your President, I am committed to representing your interest above all and pledge to work diligently and in good faith with the new Police Chief. If a cooperative working relationship can be achieved, there is no reason we shouldn't be able to achieve our maximum potential in making the Phoenix Police Department once again the envy of police labor and a place where all are proud to claim; "I work for the Phoenix Police Department."

Let me close by saying, "Welcome to Phoenix, Chief Garcia! PLEA is committed to your success and wants to partner with you to make the Phoenix Police Department a better place for all of us. Now, let's get to work!"

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