

MY TURN KEN CRANE

For police, '17 begins with a crisis



The Phoenix Police Department finds itself at the height of a critical manpower crisis at the beginning of 2017. Simply put, the department doesn't have enough police officers patrolling our streets to give you and your family the 911 emergency response and crime-free neighborhoods you deserve and demand.

How bad is this crisis? As you read these words, the city has 2,722 officers, 666 fewer than in 2008 (then 3,388). The national average for cities with populations over 250,000 is a ratio of 2½ officers for every 1,000 citizens. This would equate to 4,250 officers based on the current population of Phoenix.

Brewing since the economic downturn of 2008, this crisis has strained the department and made a dangerous job far more perilous. It has resulted in tax dollars wasted on needless overtime. And most importantly, the city's lack of police manpower has made every taxpayer in every corner of Phoenix less safe every day.

Until now, the city's response to public safety's precarious situation has been, metaphorically speaking, like slapping a Band-Aid on a deep wound. To get more officers on the street, supplemental overtime shifts were implemented, causing police overtime to soar.

The Police Department blew through \$10 million of its \$11 million overtime budget in five months. In addition, experienced detectives were temporarily punted back to patrol, leaving the public with a less effective police force.

With overtime in short supply, patrol squads have been sent to the streets short-staffed, leaving entire sectors of the city underserved and frontline cops at huge risk in confrontations with increasingly violent perpetrators.

Many sergeants start each shift by spending hours on the telephone, dialing to scare in supplemental manpower.

The chief now must move 155 officers and detectives, along with 14 sergeants, out of crucial detective and patrol specialty details to man the front lines.

The solution to this crisis will require a combination of political will and proper spending priorities. In the short term, city leaders must bolster the department budget to undo the organizational triage that has compromised solving cases and fighting crime.

In the long term, Phoenix needs to double down on police hiring. We must aggressively recruit experienced officers willing to move from other agencies and send our recruiting team out of state to seek and hire the best and the brightest to join the law enforcement ranks. We must stop accepting this lack of police manpower as a fact of life and start re-emphasizing the value of keeping the residents of Phoenix safe.

Such steps will require real political leadership — the kind that comes only when engaged citizens urge their elected leaders to put aside political bickering and solve problems decisively and immediately.

From the city manager and police chief to our mayor and city council, we need political vision, strong commitment and a fierce insistence that in Phoenix our residents must be protected.

Putting public safety first is more than a slogan.

It requires action now, immediately before this crisis costs our city not just peace of mind, but lives — be they citizens or officers — that can never be replaced.

Ken Crane is a 27-year veteran of the Phoenix Police Department. He serves as president of the Phoenix Law Enforcement Association.