



Let's talk about those 25 police cases involving deadly force

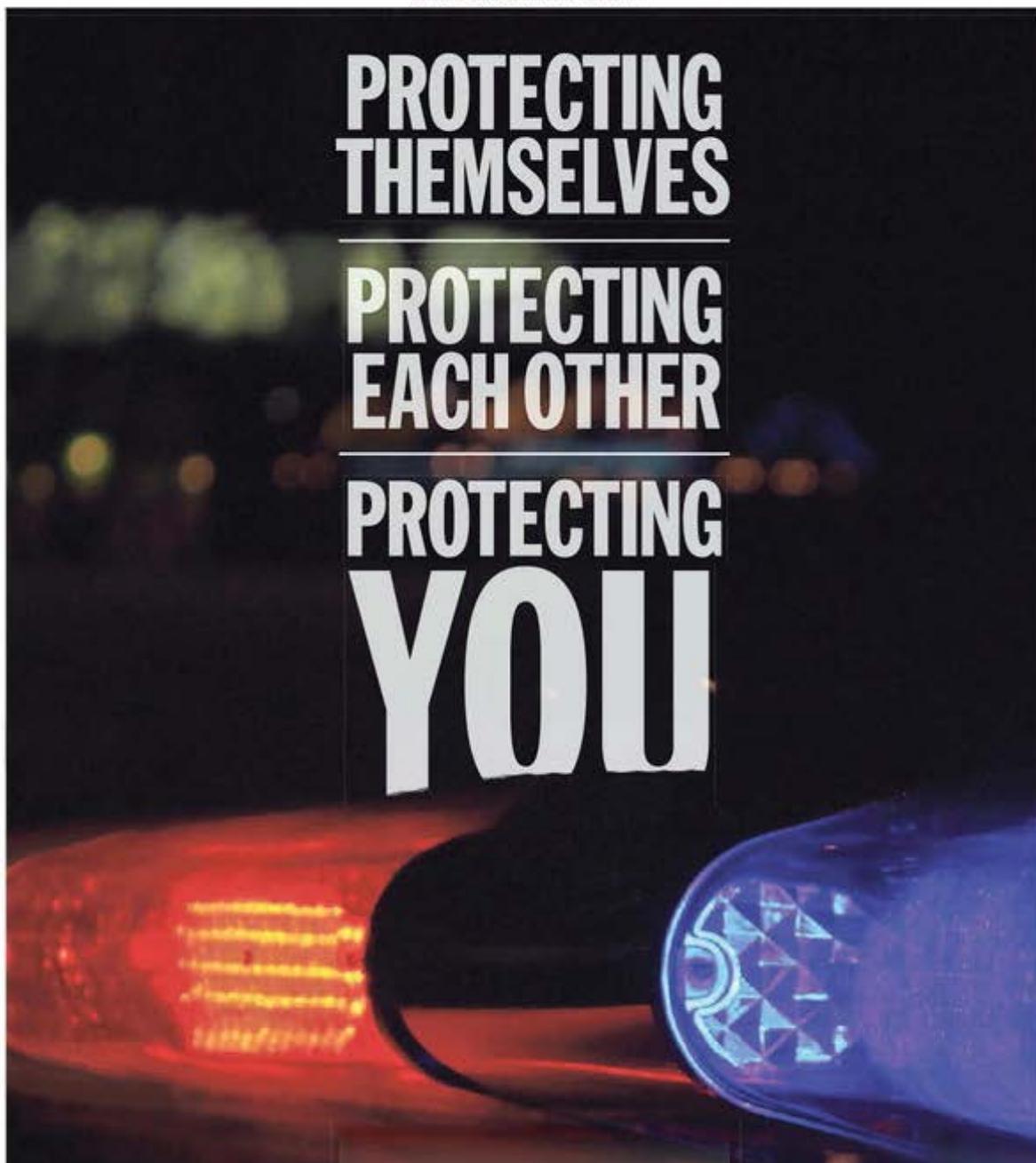
2016 was a year that saw increases in violence and divisiveness worldwide. Phoenix police officers were not immune from that violence. Officer David Glasser was shot to death, two officers were wounded in shootings, and three other officers hurt by a man who intentionally ran them over with his car simply because they wore the police uniform.

These examples seem so incredible that one may liken them to scenes from a Hollywood movie. But the reality is, our officers are confronted with that same level of violence on a daily basis. Every day, throughout the nation and here in Phoenix, officers are attacked, assaulted or injured serving their communities.

Last year alone, the violence was so extreme that Phoenix officers had to use

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deadly force 25 times to protect themselves, to protect each other and, ultimately, to protect you. Twenty-five times, men and women who have chosen to live their lives in service to us were forced into split second, life-and-death decisions that will forever change their lives.

I want to share facts to help us gain understanding and find common ground. I want you to know that 18 of these incidents involved criminal suspects with guns, guns they were using against our community and against our officers. Five of the suspects were attacking people with knives. Two suspects were fighting with lone officers and trying to take their guns.

All 25 suspects could have stopped their violent behavior but continued with their actions until it was too late. None of our officers wanted to be put into a position where they felt they had no other choice but to use deadly force. It was their last resort.

Police officers are one of the few professionals who must take an oath to serve. Our beliefs recognize the dignity of all people and recognize the sanctity of human life, rights and liberty.

The Phoenix Police Department contacts hundreds of thousands of people each year, and the result is overwhelmingly positive and productive. Our focus when working with our community is about safety and customer service; we want to help people solve problems.

The reality is that we rarely use force, even when we arrest offenders. We train to use only the amount of force necessary and react to the actions of others with professionalism and empathy. We must serve our community with pride.

We recognize the best officers are those men and women with the strongest communication and interpersonal skills. We must expect and embrace the knowledge that our actions will be scrutinized to ensure we are just in what we do. Our community deserves our best each and every time we answer the call.

As a community, we need to recognize that even a single police-involved shooting is one too many. The loss of life affects us all.

Officers are not immune from the emotional toll it takes when the violence leads to death. Yet every day, your officers put their lives on the line for our community, for their community. Understanding and empathy on both sides is essential to the health of our community and our officers.

We must unite. We must hold criminals accountable for their actions before their violence impacts others. We must work together with mental health providers and hold them accountable to meeting the needs of those with mental health issues. We must recognize that police are not the only answer to our social problems and are often called as a last resort when social services are limited.

More importantly, we must accept that we are in this together and our solution lies within the collaborative efforts of us all. Only through unity will our communities grow safer and stronger.

As we enter a new year, I encourage everyone to recognize the need to work together and to pray for safer and more unified communities nationwide.

Opportunities to meet with your Phoenix police officers are limitless. Take advantage of our Coffee with a Cop programs. Join your neighborhood Block Watch. Consider attending our Citizen Police Academy. Attend an orientation for our Explorer Post to learn about leadership opportunities for teens.

And finally, we all know someone who has the ideal qualities to be a Phoenix police officer. Encourage them to consider a career with us.

Our best hope for greater unity is to find and employ a diverse police department built with our own residents. The solutions lie within each of us, as individuals and as a community.

Jeri L. Williams was appointed in October as the Phoenix Police Department chief, overseeing law enforcement for the sixth largest city in the country. Her law enforcement career spans over 27 years. Follow on Twitter, @phoenixpolice.



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