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Behind the scenes – protecting Lafayette

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In 2014, we added the requirements to have vehicles blocking all of the roads so no one could ram through – we also added aerial over-flights to look for people on roofs, etc. We have added using the drone, but that's because we now have that technology here for us to use. Prior to every big event, we ask for an analysis of the event by our friends at the FBI and our local intelligence unit."

Christensen explained that the police plan for all types of potential incidents during public events. "Medical problems, snipers, bombing, fire, all the things that could occur – so we have a plan to start with."

Christensen notes that in Lafayette the Public Safety Committee also plays a big part in readiness and planning. He says that members of the committee, including council members Cam Burks and Ivor Samson, are all part of the "public safety team" and play an active role in operations, especially during large-scale events.

"I'll admit it, when I report to some people about what we do they roll their eyes," the chief acknowledges. "A great example is the drone flyovers. We use a FLIR (thermal imaging) device on our drone to survey all of the rooftops

and the areas that overlook the public event. I do this so I know there is no one that can cause harm."

But he says, "The day after the Las Vegas shooting I got an email from one of the organizers of the Art and Wine Festival thanking us for being proactive in our security plan."

Together with the PSC, Christensen says they continue to look for ways in which they can be better prepared. Three weeks before the North Bay fires, Lafayette hosted an evacuation workshop. "One of my current concerns raised by the North Bay fires is vulnerable populations. FEMA estimates that 30 percent of people will need assistance in getting out during an evacuation. We are currently developing a local registry where people who know they are going to need help can tell us up front – so we know where to send help when we need to evacuate an area."

Pointing for examples to the Las Vegas shooting and the North Bay fires, Christensen says the police need to develop a better way to communicate with the public. "We have now begun testing different ways that we can use public address systems to tell a crowd (public gatherings) and a neighborhood (community alerting) what to

do. In a crowd, I need to be able to tell people what to do and where to go. In a neighborhood, I have to be able to wake people up with a mobile siren system and tell them to get out."

Christensen says his officers react to incidents as they occur as well. "On Halloween, we have some streets with a lot of kids on them. After the New York thing, we added some officers to various areas of the city for the night," he said, referring to a driver who ploughed into a crowd in New York City just hours earlier on the same day. "I am fortunate that we have the flexibility to do this."

Community events provide the police with a great opportunity for training using all their resources. "When we use things like the drone, we get more familiar and proficient with the equipment. That makes us better when we need to use the equipment for an emergency."

Burks appreciates such a proactive chief. "He is innovative and pragmatic and I continue to be impressed with the skills and subject matter expertise he brings to the table, commensurate with the evolving security environment. He manages the safety of our community exceptionally well and he has my complete confidence."

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