

# Basketball can help bridge racial divide

BY TAFT COGHILL JR.  
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

In the past several weeks, police officers across the nation and the citizens they have sworn to serve and protect have struggled to find common ground.

The Caroline County-based Champion's Circle youth basketball organization and Caroline Sheriff Tony Lippa discovered a commonality through hoops.

Lippa officiated high school and college basketball for 48 years. Champion's Circle was founded by former Caroline High School basketball standouts Hubert King and E.J. Frye. Lippa volunteered to referee a Caroline alumni game that King and Frye were involved in several years ago.

Frye invited Lippa to Legacy Park Sports in Ruther Glen Monday evening for a question-and-answer session called "Champions Stand for Justice" in the wake of protests around the nation surrounding the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police.

"Tough conversations can go a long way," Frye said. "Tough conversations with my boys prompted this idea to have this event. It's only the beginning."

Approximately 60 people were on hand as the youth basketball players peppered Lippa with questions ranging from how to respond to a traffic stop to if Lippa or any Caroline deputies view black people as a threat.

King said his motivation behind the event was to give the youth players—all who asked questions Monday are black—the opportunity to have face time with the leading law enforcement figure in the county.

# CAROLINE

► FROM B1

“As a kid, my mother used to tell me every time I stepped out the door that I’m stepping out the door with two strikes being an African-American male,” King said. “So that’s kind of how I’ve prepped to raise my kids. This situation is scary. The motivation behind this event was, ‘How can we grow a community, build a community and bring the kids together so they understand the majority of people do care?’”

Lippa answered each question from the players with a few sprinkled in from adult community members. Lippa reiterated his stance from a letter he posted on social media immediately after the Floyd video was released that the knee-to-neck technique used by police officer Derek Chauvin was in violation of the policy of the Caroline Sheriff’s Office and other departments around the nation.

Lippa glanced at Rev. Duane Fields’ mask and it read “I can’t breathe,” one of the final statements Floyd made before he died.

“What happened to George Floyd broke my heart,” Lippa said. “I’m sure it broke everyone’s heart here. I was so emotional I even broke down and cried with my wife and that’s why I wrote the letter because I felt the need to write the letter ... I know your Sheriff’s Office does not train anyone to put a knee on a neck.”

Caroline residents held a peaceful protest on the county’s courthouse lawn in Bowling Green on June 2. Five days later, more than 300 gathered in the same location for community prayer.

Monday’s event was the first time Lippa or anyone on his staff answered questions surrounding police relations with blacks in a public setting since Floyd’s death.

Lippa informed the youth basketball players that if they’re pulled over for a traffic stop, they should go to the nearest shoulder of the road. They should keep their hands on the steering wheel “because it puts us both at ease.”

He said mutual respect typically ensures a peaceful outcome. He said that during an interstate stop, it may sound like an officer is yelling but it’s because they’re attempting to talk over the traffic noise and it’s not meant as a sign of disrespect.

He said the radio should be turned down and any passengers should remain quiet. Lippa added that if the driver or anyone in the vehicle is a licensed gun carrier, they should immediately let the officer know. He said passengers should also provide identification if the stop is related to issues such as potential underage drinking.

“Be straightforward with everything, have dialogue and communication,” Lippa said.

The sheriff also stated that drivers have the right to know the officer’s name and badge number. He said if a driver feels threatened, he or she should call 911 or #77 (on the interstate). He said Caroline’s policy is that officers are only to use the proper amount of force to secure an arrest and no more. He said a citizen can file a complaint online or by calling the sheriff’s office.

King said a lack of diversity is one issue he’s concerned about in police units. Lippa noted that 30 percent of the Caroline’s Sheriff’s Office is black, including two of his four lieutenants, but that recruitment can be difficult because the pay scale is lower than in surrounding counties.

Lippa said deputies serve at the pleasure of the sheriff and he’s accountable to citizens.

Lippa was also asked by a player does he believe in “white privilege.” He said he can only answer for himself and that he didn’t grow up privileged. He said his family was on welfare and his mother worked three jobs to provide for three sons.

Lippa also said he doesn’t view black men or women as a threat, but added: “I can’t tell you what somebody else might feel or somebody else might think.”

“We, the police, need to regain that trust for all of our people,” Lippa said. “The only way we’re going to do that is for people that have problems and issues, we need to come forward. We need to talk.”

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# Police chief recaps a 'challenging year'

PANDEMIC, UNREST  
HAVE TAKEN TOLL  
ON CITY DEPARTMENT

**BY TAFT COGHILL JR.**  
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

As Fredericksburg Police Chief Brian Layton prepared a slideshow presentation for City Council on Saturday, he said the headline summed up the

past 11 months: "2020 Has Been a Challenging Year."

"I don't know about all of you," Layton said, "but I am looking forward to turning the page and diving into 2021."

Layton said this year has been a rough one for those in his profession.

He noted it's been marred by the COVID-19

**SEE POLICE, A5**

# POLICE

► FROM A1

pandemic, an attempt to set fire to the city police station on May 31, “civil unrest” that led to unprecedented turnover in his department. He’s seen neighboring counties give raises to deputies, driving up the cost of keeping staff, and there are new regulations passed by the General Assembly that require officers to limit the use of force.

Layton said dialogue across the nation since the deaths of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Breonna Taylor in Louisville at the hands of police officers have made it a profession many are no longer interested in.

“There was, and I think somewhat continues, a national narrative that vilifies our police force throughout the nation,” he said. “It’s just not fair, quite honestly. I think folks are starting to grasp that. But that type of narrative has a considerable impact on the psyches of an American police officer.”

Layton said he’s experienced that impact firsthand, and has seen it affect others in Fredericksburg.

After his department faced scrutiny for the way it handled protesters from May 31 to June 2, particularly for using tear gas, 14 officers left the force.

There have been 17 departures this year, compared with 13 in the previous three years combined.

Of the 14 that left since May 31, two retired, six went to work in another locality and another half-dozen changed their career paths entirely.

“They had options outside of public service and they chose to take them,” Layton said. “I think it leads back to that narrative and what we experienced as an agency.”

Layton said his staff lost a lot of “institutional knowledge” with the two retirees, and he’s concerned about being able to recruit and retain young officers.

The city granted his request to give \$3,500 yearly raises to department staff and raise the starting salary for an officer from \$46,518 to \$50,018.

Layton said four new officers have been hired, but need to be trained and won’t be ready to patrol until October. The department remains 10 officers down and placed advertisements on three local radio stations that began airing Wednesday.

Layton said once his staff is replenished, the goal is to establish better community policing efforts, particularly downtown, on Fall Hill Avenue, and in the Hazel Hill and Mayfield neighborhoods.

“We’re not doing as good a job as we should be doing in those specific neighborhoods,” Layton said. “But we will get better as our numbers climb.”

Layton said new hires and veteran leaders participating in more extensive training will improve his force. He noted the FBI National Academy and the

Police Executive Research Forum at the University of Richmond are two training options.

But some in the community who scrutinize the actions of police officers said training isn’t necessarily the solution, because officers will often revert to natural instincts when making an arrest or confronting citizens.

“While training is an issue, it still falls on how they’re going to act on it,” said Del. Joshua Cole, D-Fredericksburg, who participated in local demonstrations against police brutality earlier this year. “You can get all the knowledge and wisdom in the world, but how are you going to react on that training you received?”

Cole was having a Facebook Live conversation Tuesday night with Sen. Scott Surovell, a fellow Democrat who represents part of Stafford County, when he made those comments. He added that the “culture” of a police department matters more than any training they receive. Surovell agreed.

“When you put some new officers together with more experienced ones, you’ll find that no matter how you trained them, they’ll start deferring to the older one,” Surovell said. “That’s exactly what happened with George Floyd.”

Layton said training isn’t his only solution to an improved department. His force added five new members to the Citizen’s Advisory Panel after two retired and three more were installed to beef up the board.

The chief said his mission in 2021 is to have the CAP more deeply involved. He wants them to join officers for ride-along opportunities, get engaged in the hiring process and serve on review panels.

They’re also going to be asked to sit in at the 911 center to observe and attend special training that officers receive on fair and impartial policing and de-escalation techniques.

“We are really going to immerse them in the workings of the police department,” Layton said.

Layton also plans to start an Explorer’s program for youth to get an up-close look at the department. He said hopefully by the time they’re 21, they’ll apply to join the force.

Layton said another initiative for next year is improved coordination with departments in the surrounding counties because the city found during the protests “we really can’t survive without our regional partners.”

The action of city police officers during the protests were reviewed internally and no wrongdoing was discovered. An independent review by PERF is due by the end of January.

“We look forward to seeing their ideas on improved training, improved directives,” Layton said. “We look forward to seeing what they have to say that we can do to be better.”

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# 1 suspect dead, 1 arrested in slaying

BY TAFT COGHILL JR.  
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A suspect in the Saturday shooting death of a Caroline County woman ended his own life during a police pursuit in Albemarle County early Monday morning.

Michael Lee Barlow, 30, of Montpelier in Hanover County, shot himself at approximately 5:30 a.m. after a Caroline County deputy side-swiped his Ford Escape SUV and forced it to come to a halt off of Interstate 64 in the Charlottesville area.

Barlow was pronounced dead at the scene.

He had been charged with capital murder, attempted capital murder, armed robbery, breaking and entering, grand larceny, possession of a firearm by a convicted felon and use of a firearm in commission of a felony prior to his death.

His passenger, Leonard Taylor Pippin Jr., 32, of Ashland, was arrested and charged with first degree murder, conspiracy to commit burglary, conspiracy to commit grand larceny and grand larceny.

The victim was Carla Marie Trost, a 47-year-old dental hygienist who lived in the 29000 block of Sparta Road in Caroline with her husband and six cats.

Trost and her husband, Steve Walker, arrived home Saturday to a burglary taking place. After Walker went inside to check the residence, the perpetrator exited and got into a shootout with Walker. Trost was killed, and the suspect drove off in the couple's vehicle, an orange Honda Element.

Police allege Pippin might have been the getaway driver, and was behind the wheel of the Ford Escape at the time of the attempted robbery and Trost's

SEE SLAYING, A5

# SLAYING

► FROM A1

death. He was wearing an orange hunting hat and Walker spotted him in the vicinity of his home, authorities said.

Tips poured in from the public and law enforcement agencies in the surrounding counties. Caroline Sheriff Tony Lippa credited a tip from Hanover County Sheriff David Hines with breaking open the case.

The suspects were identified, warrants were obtained and Barlow and Pippin were placed under surveillance. The Honda Element belonging to Trost and Walker was discovered in Goochland County.

Surveillance units began to move in the direction of Goochland and investigators from Caroline and Goochland spotted the Ford Escape Barlow was driving. The suspects fled and the pursuit wound through Goochland and Fluvanna counties into Albemarle.

Barlow displayed a handgun to Caroline deputies during the pursuit before he was sideswiped and forced to stop off of Exit 124, where he ended his life and Pippin was taken into custody.

Lippa said it was a team effort from various agencies to track down the suspects.

"The citizens who provided tips are to be commended," Lippa said. "I would be remiss to not recognize the assistance from our partner agencies, all of whom helped bring this case to a conclusion so rapidly."

Lippa said that at least one suspect was contracted to perform work around the couple's home four years ago and was aware of what was inside.

The sheriff stated that multiple firearms were stolen from the residence.

Sue Trost-Johnson, the deceased victim's cousin, said the family moved to Caroline from Springfield more than 10 years ago.

Trost-Johnson said the couple considered the rural Sparta area their "little place of quietness." Her cousin's killing is the first homicide in Caroline since 2016.

"This is such a quiet part of Virginia," Trost-Johnson said. "We knew it was remote and quaint and country-oriented and we felt everybody was safe. So it was very hard to process our beloved family member was no longer with us. Our hearts went out to her husband, Steve, who she loved very, very much."

Trost-Johnson said her cousin was a free spirit who loved her family and had a mutual attachment to animals.

Lippa would drive to upstate New York for family reunions and she took over much of the family's genealogy work after the death of her father. She enjoyed sewing and making crafts. She knitted items and donated them to family members for silent auction fundraisers.

"She would make beautiful custom pillows that everybody would try to outbid each other for," Trost-Johnson said. "Carla was very creative ... Animals gravitated towards her, so I think that tells you what kind of person she was."

Trost-Johnson said her cousin and Walker were "a perfect couple together." She said the family is now rallying around Walker and offering him emotional and spiritual support. She said Walker's "whole world has been taken from him" and that he's "devastated."

She noted the camera the victims had at the home was instrumental in solving the case, as they provided a clear picture of the man alleged to be Barlow as he entered the door holding a handgun. The images from the camera were spread across news and social media.

"I'd like to encourage any family to make sure they have some sort of cameras in their home," Trost-Johnson said. "I think that was a critical element to this case."

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