

One's Legacy

What characteristics make person or law enforcement officer successful? Years ago as a rookie highway patrolman assigned to the San Jose Area, I remember working the night shift with a California Highway Patrol Officer in San Jose, California. The long hours on patrol provided ample opportunity to discuss a diversity of topics.

When I stated a belief I have always held, that we, as police, are “public servants” my partner would get quite upset. His view was that “I am not a public servant; I am a cop”. In reply I would remind him that as officers we have the responsibility to protect the public, especially since they paid our salary. Our role is to protect and to serve, unless that is simply a mantra that we put there to make us look good but which we have no intention of making a reality. We are responsible to the public we serve.

During October of this year I was reminded once again about the qualities that make a successful person or a successful peace officer, exceptional, exceptional in their understanding of what it is to serve the public. I traveled to Visalia, California to attend the funeral of one of National Latino Peace Officers Association's (NLPOA's) Life Time Member Ralph Diaz and learned a lot of what a law enforcement officer should be and what Ralph had practiced as a cop.

At the funeral service for Ralph, his sons, daughter, nieces, nephews, members of the community and his peers shared their memories of Ralph. They spoke about how Ralph, by action more than words, served as a mentor to them. They recalled how he conducted himself among others and how he treated those that he came in contact with the respect and dignity that all humans should be accorded. Ralph by his personal example, not by preaching, demonstrated how a person should live life. His philosophy about life was reflected in the way he conducted himself at home, with friends and community.

Ralph's children spoke of how Ralph helped them clarify confusion, conflict and challenges, recalling how his clear and comforting words transported them different perspectives and solutions enabling them to move on with their lives. His grandchildren spoke of their grandfather's honesty and dedication to his family and work. They spoke of how Ralph always did the best he could. The officers that had the privilege of working with him or training under him offered similar recollections. Moreover, all his kids talked about his commitment to law enforcement and community. Ralph had been a NLPOA Member for over 25 years and was a strong supporter of its mission statement and goals.

I have been involved with the San Diego County NLPOA Chapter, as a member, for many years. This chapter is an extremely busy one. The chapter sponsors an event almost once each month throughout the year and during the Christmas season may have up to three additional events for the month.

The majorities of the members are still employed and manage to effectively embrace NLPOA into their careers, family, community and in everyday living. Many community organizations, aware of the deep involvement of the NLPOA membership throughout San Diego County and their generosity, feel comfortable in seeking assistance from the organization for their soccer, baseball, cross country or track teams. These groups know that they will most certainly receive some type of assistance from the chapter. The chapter leadership and members are dedicated to serving their community via NLPOA.

During the past Thanksgiving Season they successfully recruited businesses and other organizations to participate in various community assistance activities. This year they were able to donate hundreds of turkeys to needy families that perhaps would not have enjoyed a Thanksgiving meal. The chapter also sponsored a Youth Thanksgiving Day and during the event, over 100 bicycles were presented each kid received one.

As in years past, Christmas is nearly upon us. Once again we see NLPOA men and women actively seeking out donations so that needy families can have Christmas dinners.

My wife and I are in the process of moving out of the San Diego Area and I attended my last monthly chapter meeting last month. I took the time to reflect on the many important issues the chapter has addressed since that time, they run in the hundreds.

As a member of the San Diego County Chapter of NLPOA since 1987, I still cannot help but to be awed by the unrelenting dedication of my fellow members to the community, to NLPOA and to the badge they wear. As many times as I have attended chapter meetings, I have never heard angry words exchanged between members. There are disagreements to be sure. But disagreements are dealt with in a professional and courteous manner. Disagreements are about issues or tactics to accomplish objectives, or about the objective(s) itself. Settling the differences thus becomes a matter of arriving at a tactic or objective that is acceptable to the majority. It is never about personalities or personal attacks. It seems that every member leaves his or her personal agenda, politics and rank at the door. The entire focus is on, and solely on chapter business.

The recipients of their efforts over many years, those they have helped through their scholarship program, youth Identification kits, the young people at the CYAC, Marines and their families, numerous youth sport teams, and peace officers in need exemplify the astonishing results of their dedication and hard work.

In attending my good friend Ralph's funeral, I was reminded of the question, "How will I be remembered by those I leave behind?" The question, from my perspective, suddenly becomes THE QUESTION. It goes to a more fundamental issue, identifying the purpose of life. A friend of mine often puts it another way, "In this life, on this earth, will I be remembered as **Giver** or as a **Taker**?" The answer to either question should come to you - if you are honest to yourself - after you ask the person in the mirror. If you don't like the

honest answer, it is still not too late. It is too late only when you are on your deathbed. How will those that shared your path through this life remember you?

Vicente Calderon

12/2/2015