

Making a difference-It's easier than you think!

From time to time I hear the expression "I'm just one person, what can I do? How can what I say or do help. Usually I hear this when someone is frustrated with a problem or situation that just doesn't seem to improve over time. Because our lives can become so complicated at times we are led to believe that no matter what we say or what we do-it won't make a difference.

Around election time a popular discussion in the media is whether a single voter or small group of voters are "minimized" or "marginalized" by the special interest money that is spent on political advertising. In some cases large amounts of money are spent in an attempt to convince the viewer that the outcome is a done deal-why bother to vote-your vote won't make a difference. This is a popular strategy used by a front runner or a candidate with a large lead in the polls. It's an example of reducing the role of a single person who has a single voice with a single vote.

On the flip side of this "mass appeal" or the "inevitable will of the people" strategy is what I would like to address here-the opportunity for a single person who has a single voice to make a difference in our communities. I truly believe that each one of us, as individuals can chose to make a difference for the greater good and in turn benefit us all.

With this in mind I want to emphasize the importance of what a single person can do to help keep our communities safer. Being aware of your surroundings and being prepared to help yourself and others stay safe during an unsafe situation is a vital key to being a good citizen and making a difference in your community. Whether the actual situation is a minor occurrence or a major incident, being aware of your surroundings and being prepared to act during a threatening situation allows you opportunity to help yourself as well as those around you stay safe. Asking yourself, "what can I do?" puts you in the right frame of mind to take positive action.

Regardless of the incident, prevention and awareness allows you the opportunity to react quickly and safely to become a single person "difference maker" in an unsafe situation. Thinking about these things ahead of time does not make you a paranoid person, it is just good common sense. This is the same "advanced preparation" thinking you did for your children when they were very young. You taught them the importance of looking both ways when they crossed the street. You may have discussed a family evacuation plan with

your children if your house caught on fire. You showed your children what to do when threatening weather approached your location. Being a “difference maker” in your community involves the same advanced preparation.

Our communities and society in general has certainly changed a lot during my law enforcement career. Because of all the information technologies and new ideas that come along it will continue to change, so we individually have to change and adapt also. Each of us, on a daily basis need to continue to become more vigilant about our surroundings. At times asking ourselves, "What can I do?" helps ensure our own individual safety as well as positioning ourselves to help others who need our help in a time of need.

When I started in law enforcement in the 1970's I knew that many of the unusual observations and out-of-place behaviors witnessed by the public went unreported to law enforcement. It was a time when people generally allowed each other a lot more space and individual freedom to live their life as they chose as long as nobody got hurt. Our society seemed to be a lot more innocent and unaffected by random acts of violence at that time. Those days, whether "real or imagined" are certainly over now.

Because of this change in our society, now more than ever it is important that our citizens take action and make the effort to pass on information to law enforcement-information that may have been tolerated or ignored in the past. Communicating unusual or out-of-place behavior to your local law enforcement agency is the answer to the question, "What can I do to help keep my community safe?"

By being aware of your surroundings and being ready and willing to pass on your information and observations to local law enforcement, you are taking an active role as a single individual with a single voice-helping to keep our community safer. Thank you for your efforts in this regard!

As you were taught by your parents and then you taught your children, the same goal remains-keep yourself and everyone else around you safe and secure.

Sheriff Darrell Berglin