

From the Office of the Sheriff:

Have you ever noticed how quick society is to judge others? How quick we are to blame others for tragic events? This past week a mother violently lost her life in the 24-hour lobby of the Fox Lake Municipal Building. Most media reported a murder in the Fox Lake Police Department others reported a shooting. Few shared the accurate information that was provided and went off on their own to “create” and sensationalize the fact that the police department was unmanned and things could have been different had an officer been in the station.

The problem with these hyped reports is that they generate a tremendous amount of highly charged and emotional public opinion. Over the course of 20 or so media interviews, each and every reporter questioned the unmanned station while only two or three asked if the victim had any children. Then, after the reports focused on the “unmanned” police station, the public really got on board and there have been numerous emails, blog postings, and opinions on how law enforcement failed yet again, to help someone in need.

Nothing could be more from the truth. Those that have an expectation that each law enforcement agency can maintain a 24-hour presence within their own stations is unrealistic. It is difficult enough to maintain 24-hour coverage on the streets much less the office. I can not think of any of the 21 law enforcement agencies within Dodge County that come close to having a law enforcement officer in their station even ½ the time. This was truly a sad situation and an unfortunate event that occurred at an unfortunate location.

To ask that an officer be at every police station at all times would require the hiring of dozens of officers and administrative staff. It would pull officers off the streets were they can prevent and fight crime and put them in an environment that would be very unproductive. It would cost taxpayers millions upon millions of dollars annually to do what some are suggesting. I would love to be able to staff the Sheriff’s Department lobby 24-7 but I can’t.

Yet every time we experience this type of event there is a social outcry for us to do more. Let’s go one step further. Let’s assign an officer to every home that we routinely visit for countless domestic abuse calls, or permanently station a deputy at every highway intersection that we have experienced a traffic fatality. I am not trying to minimize the events of last week, I am being realistic.

What we can do is continually look towards technology, automation and other means of serving and educating the public. We can equip our buildings with cameras and have an emergency phone installed in our unmanned departments. These features are in place in many stations already and have been for years. Would it have changed the outcome of this most recent case, more than likely not. Each and every improvement in services comes at a price.

What most authors of the latest opinions do not realize is that law enforcement feels worse than anybody after an event such as this. Each and every time we experience a major crime and/or a senseless death we question ourselves as to why? What could we do different? What could I have done? For those with the knee jerk opinions and to those who want to blame this tragedy on an unmanned police station, all you do is make a very tragic situation even worse. Thanks for listening, tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us.