



Interview with **Police Chief Kenton Buckner**

Wednesday, Feb. 27, 2019, in his downtown office at police HQ
11:30 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.

Kenton Buckner was sworn in Dec. 3, 2018 as Syracuse's new chief of police. Buckner, who just turned 50 on Feb. 2, sat down with the founder of The Stand, now-retired Syracuse University professor emeritus Steve Davis at the end of February. In that chat lasting more than an hour and a half, the former chief of Little Rock, Arkansas, noted:

- He is outgoing in his job but doesn't like to talk much about his private side.
- The city's police will soon be reorganized from 22 territories into three, with a captain in charge of each, to be more accessible to the public. Details will be rolled out publicly in a few weeks.
- He is working with the Citizen Review Board on a better relationship and will have recommendations to share soon, but he notes that he, the union and officers have legitimate worries to address.
- The police use-of-force policy is being revised and also will be completed soon.
- He hopes new initiatives with groups such as the NAACP will help with minority recruitment.
- City cops will be back patrolling at the swimming pools this summer.
- He expects his tenure would have a typical run of 3 to 5 years.
- He believes Little Rock narcotics officers have appropriately used "no knock" warrants in drug raids, a practice that has come under challenge.

Here is a lightly edited transcript of the chat with Buckner, who spent 4½ years as Little Rock's chief.

Q: Do you live in the city? Was that a condition when you were hired?

A: I do live in the city. It was. I live in downtown Syracuse in an apartment.

Q: Have you had a chance to get out and get to know the city at all? Just walking around or on patrol with officers?

A: I haven't been on patrol with the officers. I've had several roll calls with the officers, several intimate conversations with the officers in group-like settings for a vast majority of the divisions of the police department on a couple different occasions.

Q: Have you met a lot of "regular people" so far?

A: I think so. I've been to probably seven or eight churches, I've been to a countless number of events, I've been to a countless number of meetings, I've been on panels, I've been on radio, I've been on television, I've been anywhere and everywhere that a chief is probably expected to be.

Q: And what about just getting out on your own?

A: I'm an outgoing introvert. I'm outgoing in that my job requires me to be very public, very personable, but in my private time I prefer a desert island.

Q: But does a chief have the opportunity to make friends who aren't work friends?

A: I've made several associates here. There are probably a few people I'd put in the friend category that I've made since I've been here but again, I'm kind of an introvert on my private time so that's very limited for me.

Q: Do you have a personal friend, family member, anyone that is kind of your "go to" person as a confidante?

A: I have an inner circle of probably six to eight individuals that I would describe as wise counsel.

Q: Anyone you could describe for us? Like a family member?

A: No, these are from a professional standpoint. These are not family members. These are individuals that have extensive knowledge and experience in this business and that I consider part of my inner circle.

Q: What about family?

A: I have a daughter, I have my sister that lives in Virginia, I have my mom who lives in Kentucky, my father is deceased, several family members in Kentucky and then throughout the United States.

Q: You spent what, 20 years in Louisville, Kentucky?

A: I spent 21 years in Louisville.

Q: So, what does your mom think about your latest career move?

A: She's happy when I'm happy. She understands that moving for a chief is a part of the business. If I'm happy in New York, then she's happy.

Q: Last mom question. Do you talk to her and about what?

A: Frequently. The same thing any son would call and talk to his mother about.

Q: I was just curious if anyone was coming to town with you.

A: Well, I'm a student that if you are an appointed official I've always taken the position that I keep my private life private, because I've found that it's best.

Q: I know before Syracuse you'd been a candidate for the job in Charleston, South Carolina, and I think you said you withdrew because you didn't think you'd be a finalist?

A: I didn't think I'd get the job. I was actually a finalist. But after right about a month of not hearing anything at the completion of the process, I know enough about processes that if you're the No. 1 guy there would have been some level of communication. I did not want to continue to have my current employer hanging in the balance waiting for a decision, so I made the decision to withdraw.

Q: I thought it was an interesting city to be possibly going to, given that was where Dylann Roof killed the folks in the Methodist church and it was not long ago the city council there had apologized for the city's role in slavery.

A: I'll ask you a question. Are you aware of an urban community without challenges? They don't exist. It may be apples and oranges. It may be grapes and grapefruits, but you're going to deal with something in every urban community in the United States, and if you're a chief and you understand this business you know what you're signing up for.

Q: And then Syracuse came along. How did that happen? Were you actively looking to leave Little Rock?

A: I was actively open to consider opportunities. I was contacted by the search firm to say, "Would you be interested in this location?" I studied the city and its police department: It fit the profile that I prefer, being mid-size city, mid-size police department, urban community, diverse community, a flagship university. All of the challenges the city faces today, I was familiar with in my time in both Louisville and Little Rock so I felt like I would be competitive for this process.

Q: I believe you have talked about what you felt was a typical timeline for a number of years for a person to be a chief. I know you just got here ...

A: It's three to five years. (He explains that's based on Police Executive Research Forum data.)

Q: That being said, and the kinds of mega-issues that police face that take years to solve, if ever, is that something you think community members here would be concerned about? Probably being here only three to five years?

A: I hear a thousand things from the community. I think that people want you to come to work and give them an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. I think they'd like to feel like you're committed to both the job and the community and that you are open and honest about the business that you are doing. I believe that most people understand that chiefs don't last forever, that this is a tough business, that there's a reason chiefs last three to five years in most cities, that because at some point leadership needs a new voice, needs a new vision, they need a new mission, and that's a part of change. Change is difficult for some, it's accepted I guess more openly by others, but I think that most intelligent ... people understand it.

Q: What are your top three priorities? I think you have mentioned curbing violence in the community, more diversity on the police force and creating partnerships in the community?

A: Those certainly are priorities. Those are pillars of public safety. Violent crime is something that we have to attempt to manage. It's part of the fear of crime, it's part of perceptions of your city, it's a part of the trauma when you actually have violent crime in communities. It's a part of historical scars in cities that are crime-infested, that have those historical issues of homicides, aggravated assault, where people don't feel safe in their community despite what your crime data tells you — that you had a decrease in crime one year or so. But if you go into communities where they hear shots fired every night, they don't want to hear about your numbers because they're still lying on the floor in their houses and apartments.

Our police department lacks diversity as it relates to reflecting our community both in the rank of officer, which is the entry-level part of this organization, and then at the command level there are no minorities where I believe, it is my understanding, there is one gentleman that identifies as Native American in the entire command structure, with the exception of myself. That's unacceptable. I don't know how it happened but I know I'm responsible for it today, and I am going to do everything within my power to attempt to address it in the right way going forward.

Q: Relating to diversity, [in one of your TV interviews](#), when you left Little Rock for Syracuse, you talked about your relationship with the BPOA (Black Police Officers Association) there, and you described it as one of your biggest frustrations in your four-plus years as chief there. How so?

A: Well first, it's been documented that I've never felt as if there was quote-unquote "the BPOA." There are *members* of the BPOA who would basically cast stones from that banner. Many of the members of the BPOA did not agree with some of the tactics done by a handful of the board members. The frustrating part of that for me was that any and everything that's done in the city of Little Rock somehow touches race. Whether it's a part of the equation or not, it's interjected, and for a guy who grew up with a very balanced group of friends and co-workers and people I associate with I've never really operated like that. So it's frustrating to me that every decision and every thing that we did, it was seen through that lens. And that becomes very taxing at some point.

Q: I think that about 10 percent of Syracuse officers are African-American. Do you have particular strategies on increasing the number of minority officers?

A: I've taken a direct seat at the table for the application and hiring process so that if there's someone who does not make it in our process — meaning the background investigations or anything where decisions are made on the administrative side of the process — I'm intimately involved with that to make sure we're doing the things that I feel give us an opportunity to be competitive with all races. We want quality people first but we certainly want to be reflective of our community. We believe that's equally important.

And then to develop external partners to recruit minorities. Recruiting is not a police issue, it's a community issue. One of the examples of that is where we plan to partner with the NAACP going forward to help with the written exam, and get other organizations involved. Think of what myself, police, fire and civil service can do to offer study sessions for individuals or preparatory work for the written exams, open to the entire public but certainly with a keen focus on trying to get minority candidates through that initial threshold. It's well-documented that minorities — not just minorities, many individuals — struggle with written exams, so we think that will help.

Continuing to work with youth before they become adults, like through the (Public Service Leadership Academy at Fowler) vocational program for criminal justice to formally bridge a relationship with that organization so that we will be able to effectively grow our own fruit, and

from that we hope to wrap our arms around these freshmen through senior years that are at an impressionable time of their lives to attempt to keep them on the right path until we can get them to age 21 and through the doors of the Syracuse Police Department. That method will not bear fruit immediately but we think it's an investment that's worth doing.

And I'm also reviewing adding an assessment center to the promotional process (for existing officers) so that a written exam is not the total score but part of a composite score that allows an individual to demonstrate that they can apply many of the things that someone can read in a book, for people who won't do as well with a written exam but will perform better in an assessment center where you actually apply the concepts you've been asked about. We think that will help with the promotional process.

And then we will use the consent decree (which requires municipal officials to take race into account in hiring) as a tool that it was designed to be used as — I think it's been in place for the past 39 coming up on 40 years — and use it the right way. ... And anything else we can do, of course being legal and passing the "reasonable" test, to try to diversify this police department.

Q: Were you able to talk much to Chief Fowler about his experience and some frustrations regarding diversifying the force?

A: We talked about a number of different things. I'm sure that subject came up. I don't remember if we specifically discussed that, but he and I have talked multiple times about different things.

Q: You mentioned helping with the testing for current minority officers who are seeking promotion. I read somewhere about an idea to set up opportunities for new recruits to take mock tests for practice, if testing was a challenge for them.

A: That's the purpose of the venture we plan to do with the NAACP.

Q: Are you doing anything in particular at this point to reach out — yourself — to current minority officers on the Syracuse force?

A: I've been working with CAMP 415 (association of minority officers), which is one of the partners we have in trying to help us diversity the police department. Some of them will be asked to help with the study sessions for some candidates (for promotion), or any officer, not just CAMP 415 but any member of our police department that's interested in that. And we have a number of people of all races who have agreed to be a part of a recruiting team that we will create to go out to more places, career fairs, job announcements and things of that nature to try to get our footprint out there and very well recognized in the community that we're open for business.

I've met with CAMP 415 a couple of different times to hear some of the concerns and issues they have raised in an attempt to try and get some traction on those.

Q: Do you think about race and how it seems, inevitably, to be a part of everything? I ask because on the one hand it certainly is a priority and on the other you've got a lot of other stuff on your list.

A: Yeah, I know, but it's monumental. If you're a part of that minority group that is standing on the outside looking in, then it's the elephant for you. If you're part of the majority that's in the room and you get to determine who walks into that room, then it's peanuts to you. But I have to approach it as if it's the elephant in the room because clearly our community is frustrated with it, our mayor has made it part of his charge to diversify all of city government, and certainly no department is probably more visible than the police department. He probably hears about the lack of diversity in the police department more than any other department in city government.

Q: I do know the "trust thing" is huge. Just getting people to apply to be a cop.

A: Well, law enforcement is a difficult sale in black and brown communities. There are significant present and past scars in those communities, and many believe that those scars were inflicted by public safety, law enforcement, government. In some examples, it's perception and in some they have tangible examples to prove their lack of trust. I inherit those relationships, that lack of trust, whether I was on the watch when these things happened, I inherit that when I walk in the door. Again, that's an elephant in the room that I have to address because that mistrust exists today. So when I'm trying to recruit that 21-year-old kid to come and join us on the police department, he or she may have some issues in their rear-view mirror to where they've seen the police do some things that are disturbing to them. I have to overcome that to inspire them to be a part of what policing can be or what it should be. And to be a part of the solution for Syracuse. That's no easy feat. But it's certainly not something we walk away from, just because it is difficult.

Q: So your dad was a police officer, right?

A: He was.

Q: How'd that influence you?

A: I had a very limited interaction, relationship with my father. But one of the few things I knew about him was that he was in law enforcement. It became an inspiration for me at a very young age, and I've never wavered on what I wanted to do; I never changed my major when I was in college. It was always law enforcement, and I think that's part of the fuel that has allowed me to get to the pinnacle of my profession because I'm in the lane that I wanted to be in and things are much easier when you're doing what you feel like you were designed to do.

Q: Did you ever have any negative interaction with the police?

A: No. In my community, we knew the police officers and the officers knew my name. If they came through because we were being rambunctious or doing something in the neighborhood or something where the police were in the area, it was always a very pleasant experience. I never remember looking at a police officer as a negative person. But you know, my lens could be somewhat biased in that I knew that's what I wanted to be, so I may be looking at this officer

totally different than one of my friends. I've always viewed the police in a positive light because I always wanted to be one.

Q: In our [theywearblue.com project that featured minority officers in Syracuse](#), we talked to a lot of kids at Fowler who wanted to be cops, and they answered like you did: "This is what I want to be."

A: Yeah, but I was fortunate, too, that I did not have friends who got into trouble. I had friends who later, as they became adults with substance abuse issues or issues where they came into contact with the criminal justice system, that may have changed (things for them). But growing up as a kid we didn't have friends that got in trouble with cops. We didn't see a police officer as a bad person, so we didn't fear the police when we saw them. In some communities that (fear) exists today. That was not my view.

Q: We have talked to people who have said they were interested in a police career, perhaps, but felt a lot of negative community pressure: "Why would you want to do *that*?" Did you hear that from others?

A: I did. There were people who questioned why I would want to go into this profession. Again, it's not a very popular profession in the black community and for some they have good reason to feel the way they feel. But I certainly was asked that a number of different times, why would I choose this profession.

Q: And what would you say?

A: This is what I want to do.

Q: Was that answer accepted?

A: I don't know that I looked to them for acceptance. I've always been a very driven person. I'm an alpha male, I know what I like, I know what I want to do, and I was fortunate enough to do what I set out to do. I don't know that I've ever had anyone who attempted to strongly impose their disagreement about my career choices.

You know, I don't have any friends that hate the police. I may have some guy who'll say a cop was rude to me and gave me a ticket or something but they are objective enough not to broad-brush an entire profession from an interaction with an individual. But I don't have family or friends who despise police. That hasn't been my story.

I don't run into a lot of people that dislike police. I think that most people appreciate and support police and recognize the need for police. I think that that same silent majority thinks that our profession has opportunity for improvement. I think people recognize that individuals make mistakes and do things that they should be held accountable for.

Q: At one point you were interviewing for a job in Newport News, Virginia, and I read a story about a community forum where you said you had [mentored a teenage boy in Louisville](#) who'd also been raised without a father present? You were quoted as saying you were a

workaholic and needed something to balance out your life, and the experience was more beneficial to you than him.

A: It was Big Brothers Big Sisters (of America). So, I became a Big Brother and participated with the young man.

Q: Can you share what that experience was like?

A: It was good. He seems to be doing well for himself today. He is a music artist today. He had some bumps in the road there his junior, senior year in school but he appeared to have gotten himself back on track. His mom's a hard-working woman. She had two sons, both in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. He and I were connected there for the four years before I left (Louisville). It was a good relationship. I enjoyed the time with him, and it makes me feel good today to see that he's doing OK for himself, but you know that's due largely to the fact that he had a very strong mother who was certainly doing the best that she could to try to ensure that he and his brother stayed on the right path.

Q: So how old would he be now?

A: I would say he is probably 19, maybe 20.

Q: Do you keep in touch?

A: I keep in contact with his mother. He's a "texter" at that age. His mom will send me stuff from time to time about what he's doing or whatever.

Q: So, you are not a texter?

A: I text minimal. People who like to text will sometimes become frustrated with my two-word responses, but it's my understanding texting was meant to be abbreviated communication. So if I'm going to write you a dissertation, then why the hell are we texting?

Q: What about "community policing." You have used the term and so have many others. Does it mean something particular to you?

A: I think that people have become very familiar with community policing as a buzzword or catchphrase. To me, community policing is when you're able to provide tangible examples of prevention, partnerships and problem-solving. That's community policing in a nutshell. You'll find a hundred different definitions of it if you look it up, but if you don't have partnerships with the community, and you're not preventing crime and solving problems, I really don't think you're doing community policing ... And (you need) tangible examples of it because, you know, I've been to several meetings where I'll tell individuals that if we came here to say that we've met, we've wasted everyone's time. What are we going to have as a result of this meeting? I think that communities that have not understood the meaning or the importance of collective impact ... continue to be frustrated by some things that are going on. The example that I would use is that if you go into communities that have a private high school or they have a church or something that's very, very dear to their heart, you will not see a liquor store next to that. Some communities won't allow it to happen. And there are some communities that will be frustrated by it but they allow it to happen every day. That's the difference between action and meeting.

Q: One thing in relation to the community concept is small satellite police offices in neighborhoods.

A: We have different locations throughout the city where our officers will go, the various community centers that we have, the one in Westcott, the Southwest Community Center, officers are in and out of there, we're in the schools. An organization that I had a great relationship with in Little Rock that I want to improve our footprint with here is the Boys & Girls Clubs. We'll see some of those things in the summer months. We will be back at the city pools this year. We had kind of pulled away from that last year, and there were some issues as a result of it. So anywhere we have an opportunity to constructively come in contact with youth, you will see a robust effort on our part.

Q: What was it about city pools?

A: It was basically a shortage of officers at a time when the summer months are very difficult for us to cover — the amount of calls and challenges that are going on in the summer months — and I guess that was one of the details or initiatives that they had to cut back on because of the challenges that we're facing on the streets. We just learned that because many of our school-age kids are at those pools, and with some of the challenges that reared their heads last summer, we want to make sure we get on the front end of it this year and have a police presence there for visibility and to deter any kind of distractions or fights or anything like that that may be occurring.

Q: Any other concrete plans that folks might look for in the future months that also relate to this kind of community policing?

A: Well, the police officers in the community policing unit now are centralized. We're decentralizing that area of the agency and other areas of the police department. We'll be rolling that out over the next month or so to kind of give the community an idea of how the agency will look decentralized.

Q: What does that mean?

A: Now, all of us report out of one location off of Erie Boulevard and our captains, who in my opinion are the first level of executive leadership, are on a shift (around the clock). We are going to move the captains to day hours, the kind of hours I work, and now they will be responsible for three different sections of the city that we've divided the city into, and they are responsible for those geographical areas 24 hours a day. In addition to that they'll have the community police officers that were once centralized under our administrative bureau now assigned to the patrol commanders who will then deploy them for some of these community policing initiatives — many were already doing this but will now do in a more organized way in these three central areas that we will have, which will be the north, southwest and southeast of our city.

Q: How will people learn about this?

A: We will roll it out in community meetings so people will understand how the police department is structured today and how we're delivering the services.

Q: And anything about opening these smaller kinds of “satellites” around the city?

A: That’s kind of a midterm move that we would like to see. Maybe police in a substation or something actually in the areas rather than centralized like we have on Erie Boulevard. But we have to remember, too, that we are only 25 square miles so we have to look at the financial feasibility of that and what is our gain for that in exchange for the cost that we would incur.

Q: I’m pretty sure you don’t feel you have enough officers. Little Rock, a slightly bigger city, had about 600 and we have 425 or so?

A: I’m told 460 or so are authorized, funded positions, and I’m in the process now of trying to study to see if I feel like that’s an adequate number.

Q: So, if I’m understanding, there’s 40 or so jobs that are actually open?

A: Right. We have a class right now that we’re hiring for, for 39 officers.

Q: What does that class look like in terms of demographics?

A: So far, it’s diverse, but we haven’t gotten all the way through the second background portion (of checks). We’ve got to go through medical, we’ve got to go through polygraph, there are several other stages that are left, but it’s very diverse at this time.

Q: And how so?

A: I don't know the numbers off the top of my head. I know there are 152 or so total candidates and I believe that there are probably somewhere in the neighborhood of 35ish, 40 minority candidates.

Q: Are you working with folks in the community like Clifford Ryans and others concerned with policing?

A: I’ve met Clifford.

Q: There are a lot of people like him in the community that are pretty passionate about anti-violence efforts, especially involving youth. So when you talk about partners, there are a lot of groups out there but also individuals. It’s clear you’ve met with a lot of organized groups but what about others?

A: There is a significant number of people I’ve met who are doing things or are a part of movements going on in the community, and again, any time we have an opportunity to have a force multiplier or to get a partner in some sort of initiative we’re always open to sit down and discuss that. I’ve sat down with Clifford and a number of different people about things.

Q: And they seem interested in working with you and you with them?

A: Very much so. (They) genuinely appear to be interested in just helping Syracuse. There are a lot of very passionate people focused on the challenges that we have. That’s been a very pleasant discovery of my short time, of people wanting to see Syracuse succeed.

Q: The thing with our young people and violent crime. What is going on there?

A: I think there are three primary institutions that impact the trajectory of a young person: family, education and then the clergy. In many of our challenged communities, one could argue that on a good day all three of those institutions are fractured. None more important than the household, your family, your parents; many of those households are lacking many of the essential ingredients that you would need to develop, nurture, love, provide for a young person, and our society is paying for it.

I think it's urban America. Now you can't even say urban anymore. If you look at the opiate crisis, many of our rural and suburban communities have been impacted. Just read the Book of Revelations. You really wouldn't be surprised if you'd ever read that book.

Q: Faith, I take it, is important to you?

A: It's important to me. I grew up a Baptist. I still practice a Baptist faith. I am not a person that is in church every Sunday, but I certainly subscribe to a higher being and certainly feel like I've had the good fortune of blessings and mercy because of that relationship.

Q: I want to ask you about the Crime Reduction Teams. Is that something you're going to continue?

A: We'll continue to have that mission. It's important that you have a unit that is able to go into areas based upon intelligence-led policing, to address the right locations and focus on the right individuals in those areas. I have to make sure that we're doing that in a way that we're not unintentionally harming the community, because I'm also well aware they (CRTs) have been the source of some complaints, and some of the mistrust in the community. So, I have to make sure we're doing business the right way. That's a part of my job, to make sure we're training folks the right way, that we're hiring the right people, and that we are providing public safety efforts in a way that is seen as respectable by the citizens that we're trying to serve.

Q: So this is something you're looking at and might change?

A: The mission won't change. I'm a person who believes from time to time you need to switch individuals out so I may have some leadership changes at some point with that, but that's not a reflection of a person not doing anything. I believe there is value in moving people around, so that will be maybe some change we see sometime in the future. But for now, we certainly will continue to press forward with that unit.

Q: I've heard people say this is exactly what we want, and other people who feel maybe it's a form of racial profiling or stop-and-frisk Maybe you just happen to be driving through a so-called high-risk area so you get pulled over. I don't know if you've heard any of that?

A: Well, I've heard that in multiple communities. This is my third state and my third police department and that's a common complaint that you hear: Disproportionate arrests of black and brown people, a criminal justice system that disproportionately prosecutes, incarcerates black and brown people. I think you could probably find data to support some of these arguments. I also think that if we just look at the eye test, that if we look at crime that is going on in our community — and if you just look at the most prevalent, as far as newsworthy, violent crime — it is no secret that we see that more so in our black and brown communities. And for a

variety of different reasons. It doesn't necessarily have anything to do with race. In many instances, it has to do with poverty, the lack of opportunity, or the lack of employment or mental illness or substance abuse. I think race appears to be low-hanging fruit sometimes as far as you point the finger as that being the reason why, but there are many things that I think contribute to that. The one thing that people often forget about when that conversation is mentioned about these disproportionate things as it relates to black and brown folks is that black and brown citizens are also disproportionately the victims of crime. That's always left out of it. And when we ask the victims of crime to describe the person that stuck a gun in your face, guess who they describe? Someone that looks like them. So who am I supposed to go and stop?

But that certainly does not give us a green light to be unconstitutional. It doesn't mean we have a right to profile anyone. And we certainly can't act as if maybe there aren't some incidents where that occurs. But my job is to make sure that when we see that, we do that, we stop it, we hold people accountable for it when we (police) do it. I'll go to my grave believing that the vast majority of police officers are professional and do a great job, they provide a great service. But there are some individuals who should not be in our profession, and my job is to hold those individuals accountable and support the good officers who I believe are the majority.

Q: There was a group of activists meeting to discuss use of force by officers in the SPD. The group's mission was to see the policy amended to not only cover when it was OK to use force, but to also feature detailed guidelines on how force could be avoided to begin with. This is something other departments around the country are doing. A story I read said you had been unable to join the local group when it met recently. Have you connected with them? And what do you think of this idea?

A: I don't know of a professional police organization that doesn't train on when you can and cannot use force. That makes no sense. Part of that to me, listening to you at a distance, it sounds like part ignorance on the part of the public on what the police actually train on. Which to me says, there's an opportunity for improvement in illuminating (for the public) the curriculum that we have for the training academy on the sensitive topics that are key to the community and what we have in place to try to protect the public from officers kind of developing their own agenda or doing something that would be illegal. We're in the process of revamping our use-of-force policy, and I anticipate the new policy will be ready here over the next 30 days.

We will roll it out where the public can see it for themselves.

Q. I have never seen the policy itself. Does it currently include guidelines about steps to avoid the use of force?

A: The escalation, and taking other things into account, is a part of any use-of-force policy. Here's the problem: There is no policy for the public. If I'm having an issue with this young lady who's leaving Marshall Street and she's intoxicated and she's decided to do whatever she is doing, I'm responding to this level of resistance. So, I can have all of these things that say, "You shall not hit a person in the head" — there was something written in the paper that someone recommended that we have a policy that says you shouldn't be able to hit someone in the

head. Well, that sounds good in a climate-controlled room. “Hey, that’s reasonable.” But if you’re in the business of wrassling with lions, it’s very difficult to tell someone, “Well, don’t hit the lion in the head when he’s on top of you.” You’re trying to get this lion off of you. So there’s always suggestions about what we should be doing and how we should do it. We should always be legal, we should always be compassionate, we should always use force as a last option, we should always try to de-escalate the individual that we’re encountering. But sometimes that doesn’t work. And sometimes this job is ugly. That doesn’t mean that it wasn’t legal and it wasn’t necessary.

Q: Is the written use-of-force policy something folks can get their hands on if they want to read it?

A: I think our policies should be FOI-able, you should be able to get a copy of that. I can’t think of a reason why you shouldn’t. But again, New York law may be different. But I would think our policies would totally be subject to that (Freedom of Information) law. I would think. You’re a reporter. Have you ever FOI’ed a policy?

Q: Well, my question is simply that it seems like it’s something that would be on your website. Someone wouldn’t have to FOI it.

A: I can tell you it’s not on our website. I’ve worked for departments, my two previous, where we had key policies online. But I’ve been here 60, 70 days I can’t turn the ship. And part of the reason why is because of what? I’m sitting here doing interviews every day.

Q: Well you’re reaching several thousand people with this interview. It’s good, efficient use of your time.

A: We’ll see.

Q: But you know what I’m asking. It would seem like I could go to a website and read this.

A: I think that you are highlighting an intelligent observation and request that the policies and procedures utilized by the public safety entity for Syracuse should be readily available to the people that we serve. I don’t disagree with you. Now I’ve got to talk to my legal people. I’ve got a union who’s going to be on my shoulder. There’s a lot of things that you want to do as a chief that there are hoops you have to jump through to do something that you would say, “Well, what the hell’s wrong with that?” It’s not that simple.

Q: I wanted to ask you about something I read that was described as your personal professional code of conduct. Can you tell us what your personal code is?

A: When things are difficult? My job is difficult every day. I have three very jealous professional “wives”: My appointing authority, the police department and the community. And if any of the three feel like they’re not No. 1, they’re going to pull you in a direction to make you understand that you’re supposed to be over here. And a chief gets pulled in many different directions on a number of different topics, and every decision that I make impacts a significant number of people. So in order for me to survive in that environment, I have to have something that I lean on that will give me stamina in these arenas where I’m pulled in so many different directions and that has always been to focus on doing the right thing. That even if it results in you being at

odds with one of those three (wives) or two of those three or all three of them, if I can look in the mirror and feel like I did the right thing based upon what I believe in my mind and my heart, and the value system that I have, I'm OK with that. I gave up being popular a long time ago. I've found when I focus on that (personal philosophy), that I've been able to survive in this profession.

If you have a faith, you know you're going to be judged on your leadership one day. And God knows what you did under the cover of darkness. He knows what you did when no one was looking. You're going to be judged on that one day. That's the ultimate judge.

Q: Have you met any folks from the Citizen Review Board and thought about your relationship with them?

A: Yes, I've met (administrator) Ranette (Releford) who is seen as the administrator of it. Clifford (Ryans) of course is a member. I can tell you that in my preliminary summary of the police and CRB issue, I think that by design, unintentionally, it's not working. I think that there are some opportunities for improvement in the language that kind of tells each side what they are supposed to do. I think that needs to be revamped.

We're in the process of getting ready to meet on both sides of the aisle to give the Common Council something to review to consider changes. One of the things that I take issue with is that we as a police department are not being as transparent as we possibly should, and some of that may be our mistrust of that system. On the other side of that, I don't like the fact that there is a totally independent other investigation (by CRB), because you're subjecting the officers to almost a double jeopardy kind of situation to where now they're having to come in and give statements about something else. To now where if you have one word or something that someone deems slightly different than the statement that you gave over here, when you're in civil court over some of these lawsuits, we're seeing the defense attorneys are taking testimony or statements from CRB and using it against the city in some of the civil litigation. So, I understand why the officers — frustratingly to the public and to the CRB — are exercising their due-process right not to give a statement. And that's their right. Whether we like it or not you can't penalize someone for exercising something that the process says you have a right to do.

But I think it clogs up the system. I think it continues to feed this animal of mistrust, and I think that if we are more transparent about what we are doing over here, I think CRB will be able to do its job in a more efficient way and help with that. Then I think that if they will agree to review *my* investigation, and if there's something else that maybe I didn't cover or that I should have covered, that they can ask the appropriate questions without having another quote/unquote "investigation." Or, if you're going to do investigations on that side at least have people who have knowledge, skills and abilities, trainings, certifications in investigations. There are a lot of very good people on that committee who certainly want to see Syracuse succeed, but they have no experience, no background in doing an investigation.

I understand both sides of the argument, but I have to look in the mirror first, which is I think that we can be more transparent. But, again, I have to do that in a legal way because the

union's argument is that we can only share limited information with them (CRB). In my conversation with my corporate counsel, we believe maybe in some regards the union may be right but in many regards that's not true because that (CRB) is considered a government entity, so the same things that we'd be able to share with government, the CRB should be given.

And I always use a visible example that if I make a decision on an officer and if I exonerate the officer for the actions that he was accused of, and I did it upon these three things that I based that decision upon, then when Ranette asks "OK, can we see the file so that we can see what you all did because we have that complaint over here?" And then we're surprised when she comes to a different conclusion. Well, we didn't give her everything that we had to come to *my* conclusion. So it's not fair; that's my frustrating part on our side of the aisle. If I'm doing business the right way, why would I have a problem with giving her the file? "Here's everything. Take a look at it." And I think that's a big step on our part. We need to fix that.

Q: I think everyone would agree it hasn't worked great so far.

A: For a long time.

Q: There are many of these citizen boards around the country.

A: There are. And I think, too, it should be said that even though there's a lot of publicity that comes out about the disagreements, more often than not they clear the officer of any wrongdoing. There's only a smaller percentage of cases where they look at it and feel like the officer did something wrong. And I don't think the public knows or even understands that part of it because I think sometimes the CRB gets a bad rap that they're anti-police or out to get police when in fact they clearly clear more officers than they sustain (complaints).

Q: They do put out an annual report that shows that.

A: Yes. But if you talk to people, some people think they're out to get police. "Well, (you think that) based upon what?"

Q: But it doesn't come down to a discussion of those cases where cops are cleared or supported by the CRB.

A: Right.

Q: I guess that is the nature of the beast.

A: It's the three or four that make the news that we say, "Oh, wow."

Q: But those are the ones that create all the tension.

A: It is. It only takes one "good" one.

Q: But you see a way, even on those ...

A: I see a way to improve this process. I don't know we'll ever have a process where everyone will be happy. But I think if we put intelligent people in a room, we should be able to improve the process.

Q: Do you see officers ever appearing before the CRB? I'm not sure they ever have.

A: That's huge. I think a lot of that will depend upon guidance and leadership provided by the union. Because we can go in a room and discuss all day what we believe is a fair process, and if the union doesn't believe that it's fair or that they'd rather not participate, we're in a union state.

Q: I want to ask you about a [story in The Washington Post about the "no knock" drug warrants](#) the Little Rock police force used routinely, and the questions about whether these kinds of warrants were overused or abused.

A: You should make sure your readers know that story was listed in the Opinion section of The Washington Post.

Q: It seemed to be journalistically reported.

A: But you know, as a reporter, the Opinion section is just that. That's his opinion.

Q: OK. Fair enough. What can you say about it?

A: Obviously, it is part of active, ongoing litigation in Little Rock. I can tell you that in my review of the officers' actions in question with the gentleman that initially raised the issue that I've seen nothing thus far that would lead me to believe that the officers intentionally did anything wrong. There were a couple of administrative things we looked at where we could say, "Hey, we could probably improve this." But as far as the process by which we went about doing the "no knock" search warrants and the circumstances that led to that, we believe that we are on good legal ground and the City of Little Rock certainly looks forward to having their day in court to present all of the facts and not just what was printed in an Opinion article.

Q: Was this statement correct? Or do you know? The article stated that out of 105 warrants sought by the Narcotics Unit, in something like 101 or 103 cases they were granted these "no knock" warrants where a door can be busted down.

A: I don't know the specific numbers. I will tell you the majority of those kinds of warrants are going to be "no knock" because of the fear of a couple things: In many instances there is a safety argument that the officers have because of information described from an intelligence standpoint, that the individuals (suspects) are armed, or that they have a violent history as relates to their criminal history for the person that is the subject of the warrant, and then the destruction of evidence. Those two things are the two pillars when you are going (to the court) to seek "no knock" warrants. And Little Rock has been listed among the most dangerous and violent cities in the United States for decades. So it should not be a shock to anyone that the police don't want to give you a significant heads-up that we are getting ready to enter your house.

Q: Absolutely. And the story did say that, very clearly. The issue people were having was not that there were "no knock" warrants, but that 99 percent of the time they were these kinds of warrants. And courts are quite clear that just because it's a drug investigation doesn't mean it's by nature a "given" to be a "no knock."

A: Understood. But here's what else you don't know that's not printed in that article. There are many instances where I have a "no knock" warrant for Mr. Davis, but in actually sitting on your home and doing surveillance on it on the day we're getting ready to execute the warrant, there are a number of times that we will grab you in your driveway as you're getting ready to go to your house even though I had a "no knock" warrant. So that's counted in your 101 or your 103 that there was a "no knock" warrant issued — but it was not executed. There are so many things once you dive into the information, which is why we always tell people, "Well, we'll tell our side of the case when we get the appropriate time." But right now we have one person talking. An attorney for this gentleman and this reporter. But the city will have its story. But that's just one example of that number — be careful what you put into that number.

Q: My impression was that one of the biggest issues raised was the high percentage.

A: Well, I think if you ask most public safety individuals, would they be shocked to learn a high percentage of the people that we execute drug warrants on are either armed or have a violent criminal history? Ask that question.

Q: Have you read that story?

A: Parts of it. Again, I think it's a guy who's taken the version of Mr. (Roderick) Talley (the key complainant) and ran with it and when everything comes out I think people will see a more balanced argument as it relates to what actually occurred.

Q: The reporter does talk to quite a number of people like Mr. Talley.

A: You asked me a question earlier today. "Chief, what are you going to do about violent crime? What's your plan?" So if I were to ask you, "What is probably one of the primary common denominators of conflict in violent crime encounters?" What would you think that would be? The drug trade. What is the primary resource of gang members?

Q: Guns.

A: And drugs. So why is everyone shocked? Think about what we're saying. Every night you see something on TV where someone is shot or stabbed, or something has happened to them, yet people expect us to walk up (knock loudly on the door) and say, "Shooter, are you in there?" That's not how the world works.

Q: Again, a major part of the question raised was the percentage.

A: Doesn't surprise me at all.

Q: But still, someone might say — and yes, you're right that there is just this one side out there in a substantial way in the newspaper reporting so far — someone would question what seems like the 99.99 percent nature of these warrants. It seemed like every time.

A: But that's for warrants. How many "knock and talks" have police done? A "knock and talk" is where you go where we have a complaint about a location, we do the criminal history on the individual and nothing really comes up that says that we have any reason to fear that we have any intelligence about a weapon or anything like that, so we'll actually go knock on the door and say, "Hey, Mr. Davis, this is Detective So and So and this is my partner Detective Such and

Such. We have a complaint that you're selling marijuana from your home. We can handle this informally today, by probably giving you a citation. We'll come in, search your home, you can sign this consent form, we'll do our thing and be about our way. If that's all that you have, if you're honest with us, we can probably work something out for you. How would you like to handle this today? Or we can come back at another point if we're able to corroborate some of this information that we have about this and we'll do it a different way. And the next time we won't knock on your door. How would you like to proceed?"

In many instances people will say, "Well, man, I do sell a few nickel bags to my friends but it's only my friends. I don't sell to everybody. So I'll give it to you all and you can give me a citation."

So you see in contrast to these 103 warrants, how many "knock and talks" did we do? Or how many traffic stops have we done that didn't result in a warrant? So if you look at the total number of people that have been arrested through Narcotics, through that unit, versus the hundred warrants that you've done, you'll see that this percentage you're doing — the 99 "no knocks" — there are many other avenues that we come into contact with the public to where we don't even do a warrant.

Again, part of the balancing of the story.

Q: I saw you quoted saying, "People treat you how you allow them to treat you. One of my personal things is never, ever, ever make a complaint with someone who answers the phone. But instead talk to someone higher up."

A: I think the context of that situation was about if you feel like the government, police or certain officials are not serving you or giving you what you deserve as a community, don't discuss your problem or complaint with the person who answered the phone. You want to speak with the person in that office who has the pen. And that's where you get problems solved. And people who get things done in their community know and understand that. So when you go down there to that office, ask to speak to the captain or the division commander in that division to let them know that this is the third time you've called about this crack house in your neighborhood or why it's six months later and nothing's been done about it. Hold that person accountable. And then who does *that* person report to? Because people who understand how to engage people like me, they're not going to let you give them lip service. They're going to say, "When can I follow back up with you? And what number should I call to let you know if I continue to see something?" But we have to train certain sections of our community to do that because they don't even realize the power that they have. You're the citizen. We serve you. My salary comes from your taxes.

Q: But does some training have to happen on the other side of the desk?

A: I think so. That's a part of the neighborhood watch thing and that collective impact. When I was at a meeting up in Strathmore, I told them that I would maybe either bring people to their meeting or have some of their officials go with me to other parts of the city who don't understand how you get a sidewalk fixed. You don't send one email. You send 150 emails to

Mayor Walsh or Kenton Buckner to say, “Hey, we’ve got a problem over here, in such and such, and when are you all going to do something to that store down here that’s selling alcohol to minors?” Now, if I get 50 of those, do you think something’s going to happen? Of course it is. But there are certain people in our community who don’t even understand the power that they have, particularly when they work together. So that’s what that statement is about. Don’t talk to the person who is answering the phone who you feel like is blowing you off. Talk to the head person in that building.

Q: I think some times people are hesitant when dealing with the police.

A: There’s some intimidation, exactly right. Which is why I try to talk to them about empowering yourselves or when we try to galvanize the community with the partnership and the prevention and the problem-solving. That’s what that whole community policing (is about) and there’s a certain empowerment piece of that, that “you all have power, if you learn how to exercise it.”

Q: So if folks call the police department and say, “I want to talk with the officer with the pen ”

A: Do more than call us. Hold the police department accountable to your community.

Q: How? In a very literal way, do what, again?

A: Know who is responsible. So that at a community level, this is what decentralizing this police department does. You live in the southeast section of our city. Who is the division commander for that section? I can tell you it’s Captain Lynch. When you have a problem you need to be talking to Captain Lynch. Directly. You tell them, “I want Captain Lynch to call me back.” That’s where you start. If Captain Lynch doesn’t satisfy what you’ve asked him to do, then you call headquarters: “Chief, I’ve met with Captain Lynch twice and we still have a problem. There’s still illegal dumping behind my house. I’ve got pictures of it, we’ve got the license plate of the truck that’s coming through here and doing it, and we’d like to know what we can get done.” (Be) relentless about making sure that gets done. And if I don’t respond to you, go to the mayor.

Q: So if I’m understanding you, under the new decentralized model, you think folks are going to more easily find the person with the pen.

A: I think they will because one of the things is these captains will no longer be this kind of shift captain. I’m pushing them to go out into the community. I can’t be the only one going to churches. I can’t be the only one going to the schools. I can’t be the only one going to the business association luncheon. If you have these entities, these seven or eight pillars in your community, you should know every person that when you’re having a problem in your specified area, you should have a Rolodex of a hundred friends that you can call. I’m building my own Rolodex from the chief’s desk. The captain should have his own list of stakeholders that he or she can call upon to say, “Hey, we’re having a problem with car break-ins. I need you guys to put this out on your email tree to help us out, try to reduce this. The car’s a red Pontiac Grand Prix, and if you see this vehicle, give us a call.” You have to get out of the office to go build that relationship, at that level.

Q: Can you reiterate again, how these captains will be working in the new way?

A: In the new way, they will not be on a day shift, mid-shift, late watch, which to me took power and authority away from them. They will be working the primary business hours that I work, kind of the day hours into the evening of business time during the day, community connection during the evening. And they will be in a specified area; now we're broken up into 22 territories, but we're just one city is how we're deployed. Tomorrow, which is our new way, we will be this (in three areas): Captain, captain, captain, so when I've got a problem that you're calling me about, "Chief, we continue to see these people over here in such and such," the first person I'm calling is this captain (one of the three). "I just got a complaint on such and such, you need to get our officers over there to take pictures of that house where they're doing prostitution out of it and forward that over to Public Works to get that boarded up. And then I'm going to check back with you, or *you're* going to check back, to say, 'Well, this hasn't been done yet.'" Right now we don't have this level of contact with the public. Every citizen should know who their captain is that's responsible for their neighborhood.

Q: And when will this happen?

A: We hope to roll this out by the end of March.

Q: Final thoughts?

A: Syracuse, I believe, is a city where we have some energy that is going on right now. I think that there is optimism going on right now. We have a young mayor, we have a young county executive, who have expressed their willingness to work with each other to try to help Syracuse and Onondaga County. ... I think ... if we're going to see Syracuse reach its full potential, it will be because the people that live in Syracuse, that work in Syracuse or Onondaga County, have gotten on the field and are engaged with the challenges that we face. Without that, we will continue to be frustrated.