

Chief:

What are your thoughts concerning our high crime rates and what can be done to lower them?

Unarguably, Alamosa has historically had the highest crime rates of comparable-sized communities in Colorado which in-turn negatively impacts the safety of citizens and economic development opportunities of our community. Crime is a complex issue involving many contributing factors. As with any problem, we need to first seek to contain (prevention) it and then systematically address the underlying root causes. While we shouldn't rely solely on data before taking action, it should play an integral part in decision making. Similarly, we must also pay attention to our anecdotal beliefs and outside perception. Crime plays a significant role when others are contemplating relocation, starting a business, sending a child to school, spending recreation dollars, or leaving an area so it is directly tied to our economy and quality of life.

Below is an excerpt of a communication that was recently sent to me describing how an outsider described Alamosa.

"Alamosa has always been a hotspot for criminal behavior. The Vally—Alamosa in particular—is rife with gang activity; a distribution hub for drug trafficking; it historically has been a destination or transit center for illegal immigration; has higher than average unemployment; it's always had palpable racial tension, high numbers of uneducated, and has pernicious levels of poverty."

Regardless of how we interpret these statements, the fact is the perception exists, and not just with this person. Another example is a lady who spoke at a recent City Council meeting; she vividly described her mother's ugly view of our community. In our business, we hear stories and comments like these regularly, and not just from outsiders. In terms of our crime problems and criminal offenders I have been told that Alamosa is a *dumping ground*, a *cesspool*, and other words not suitable for print. This should not be the norm; rather the exception.

As a community we are stepping to the plate and engaging in difficult conversations to change our stereotype:

- City Council proposed and enacted an ordinance prohibiting panhandling in certain areas of our City. This was a sensitive topic that pulled on our heart strings because of the compassionate and giving community we are. While this topic was somewhat controversial, we have all but eliminated our public safety concerns with a new ordinance, while continuing to meet the needs of local citizens. The ordinance has been in place for almost 6 months with no negative repercussions. In fact, we learned that the overwhelming majority of panhandling that was occurring was being done by those traveling through our community to somewhere else.
- City Council exercised its option not to allow the public retail of Marijuana in the City. I applaud this decision as it has been my experience that where you store/sell drugs and keep money, you risk an increase in crime. This decision was also a bit controversial; but a good one. We were

able to support the desires of the voters and yet exercise our ability to opt out of public retail as was permitted by the amendment.

- County Commissioners recently introduced a new topic for community conversation that centers on Community Corrections programming in Alamosa. This comes as a result of a desire to reduce crime and be fiscally responsible. Like the public retail clause in Amendment 64, Community Corrections programs are a local control issue. As a community, we can decide whether or not to have a program and if we choose to have a program we can design it. I believe we need a program, but its size needs to be commensurate with the capabilities of our community and we should limit offender importation. It is no secret that Alamosa has plenty of its own offenders; we don't need new offenders without ties to Alamosa or the San Luis Valley.

Beyond data, perception, and stories we need to keep Community Aesthetics at the forefront of all conversations. Outside tax dollars and resources are critical to our community and so when someone drives to and/or through our community; our outward appearance in all regards is the lasting impression left on those and their decision to return.

Discussion is healthy; I encourage anyone with thoughts and ideas to engage conversation in the many public forums that exist.

Craig Dodd, Chief of Police