

CHEYENNE HERALD

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What a difference a Chief can make

Three and a half years ago, Jim Mathewson and I met with then Police Chief Bob Fecht. Jim wanted to ask him about “parking” HUD money that was intended for the needy - on the false premise that it would be used to raze three “meth houses.” Fecht brought then City Attorney Mike Basom, with his volumes of State Statutes, to the meeting in his (Bob’s) office. They must have been worried Jim and I would test them on the law.

They sat across from each other at a round table so Bob could get signals from Mike when a question was asked.

I've met twice with current Police Chief Brian Kozak and at neither meeting did he consider it necessary to have the city attorney present.

Anyway, before Jim asked his questions, I wanted to soften up the Chief and I asked him about drug and gang problems in Cheyenne. He told us, less than four years ago, that there were no gang members in Cheyenne then - only “wannabes.”

Well, there were at the time and there still are. Could Fecht not have known that?

The difference between Bob Fecht (other than college “degrees” - Bob’s not being worth the toilet paper it’s printed on) is that Kozak will level with residents. He will accept your calls, answer your questions and you can, I believe, count on him being honest and to give candid answers.

The lesser paper had a story the other day about graffiti, often if not usually tied to gangs, and one of the revelations in that story was that Cheyenne *does* have a gang problem, not to compare to Denver’s admittedly, and has had gangs in our midst for “20 years.” Graffiti is, of course, a scourge written about on these pages for a long time and it is about time the WTE acknowledges the problem.

Before getting to the graffiti and the great damage painting on another’s property does to a local economy and potential growth, let’s finish about the gang issue. The two are linked even if Bob Fecht didn’t know it.

If you were mayor of Cheyenne, how many identified and confirmed gang members would you be comfortable having reside and operate here? Ten? Fifty? A hundred? A thousand? What would be the tipping point before you took that presence seriously and committed resources to deal with the problem? How about one? That sounds like a good number to me.

Brian Kozak has experience and a background of identifying and dealing with gangs. He accepts that preventing the problem is a better approach than dealing with it once it has taken root in your city. Unlike Fecht, he knows there are gang members, not just wannabes, in Cheyenne and his department is trying to control the problem - not ignore it as Fecht did while he was police chief.

One of the great “breaks” in hiring a person in a management or leadership role is when you can find a candidate who has learned on someone else’s dime. That is the case with this police chief. He didn’t come to Cheyenne from Kimball or Cody.

If Rick Kaysen screws up everything else he touches while mayor, like the trees, contract modifications, the downtown, etc., he will be remembered as the mayor who hired Brian Kozak. It isn’t often that a city as small as Cheyenne can hire a person with the qualifications and expertise of this police chief. Witness the recent screening process for a new fire chief. Most of those guys had been run out of their last job in another community. Whomever the other finalists for police chief were, and two came from within the CPD, Kaysen hired a good one.

How long will Brian Kozak be here? If he is here for even three years or five years, he should be able to improve and shape the department so a successor will be better prepared to follow him.

I know Brian Kozak has to take some heat when the Cheyenne Herald praises him but, until he fails at his job, there is no reason to search for things to be critical about. Gang and graffiti efforts by the CPD are greatly appreciated. And long overdue.

CINDY HILL

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