

Behind the Badge: Thanks to people behind RAGBRAI's success in C.B.

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As a new chief of police, when I heard the words "RAGBRAI is coming to town," I was less than thrilled. The first thing that came to mind is, how are we going to make everyone safe? Where am I going to get the people to assist with an event of this magnitude? Once the executive committee selected the Mid-America Center location, I voiced my concerns but assured them that we would do everything to make the event safe and secure.

I then included Capt. Scott Milner, Lt. Dan Flores, Sgt. Chad Meyers and Officer Darren Budd in the planning process. They were given the assignment to make the area from the Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge to the MAC Center secure for vehicle, pedestrian and bike traffic in order to protect and ensure that the three could operate safely on the same streets.

They were also told that Ribfest would be at the Mid-America Center and was taking place the same weekend as RAGBRAI –crowd estimates could reach up to 40,000 people and the band, Barenaked Ladies, was performing at Ribfest on Saturday night in an open air concert.

I am confident that each city department head and the host of other volunteers had their own concerns ranging from where all these people are going to stay, to how to handle a medic run in the area, where are all the barricades going to come from and trash concerns – just to name a few.

After several meetings, a common theme emerged from all the committee members and the people involved. Everyone involved was confident that their concerns could be handled, and all committee members from the chairperson to the individual members rallied around this event and location. We each had one goal in mind: To showcase Council Bluffs. Larry Foster, city parks director, said when the executive committee needed something, everyone did all they could to say yes. The success of this event was truly a community-wide effort.

Meyers and Budd put together an action plan that addressed all the concerns voiced at our meetings. Their effort is truly appreciated by myself and command staff. I would like to thank them. They also lined up help from several law enforcement agencies such as the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the Iowa State Patrol, Iowa Department of Transportation, Pottawattamie County Sheriff's Office and Pottawattamie County 911 Center.

Local businesses that assisted the Police Department were Paul's Yamaha, Hy-Vee and Wal-Mart. These businesses made the use of specialized equipment available and provided water and ice to keep our officers hydrated. I would like to send a special thank you to all of them.

One of the things I learned from this event is the commendable level of professionalism displayed by all the citizens of this community during the event. I am sure several were inconvenienced during this event, but all took it in stride.

As chief, I would like to thank the men and women of this department. For the sake of success, the department cancelled vacations, and officers were required to work overtime. The comments I received from the mayor and other department heads were positive.

And it was certainly welcomed to hear "thank you" from the participants of RAGBRAI as they rode by a police officer assigned to traffic control at 5 a.m. on Sunday morning.

– Ralph O'Donnell is chief the Council Bluffs of Police Department.