

From: Chief David Zack <dzack@ashevillenc.gov>
Sent: 5/17/2022 8:48:19 AM
To: Bill Davis <bdavis2@ashevillenc.gov>
Cc:
Subject: Re: AC-T Article with your interview

Thanks Bill.

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On Tue, May 17, 2022 at 9:30 AM Bill Davis <bdavis2@ashevillenc.gov> wrote:
Chief,

I realize you've likely already seen, but passing your way just in case. I'm sure that one was one of the more gut-wrenching interviews, considering the horrific act of violence and your personal connection to the area and the folks there. I thought these, among others, were good quotes that drove home the message.

"Seconds mean everything. Seconds save lives.

"It's not the firearm that did the killing. It's the shooter that did the killing, the individual, a severely mentally ill person with a lot of hate in their heart and extremist views. Even with the toughest gun laws, he still was able to get his hands on a firearm.

And let's face it, what stopped the shooting or prevented more deaths, was that there was somebody inside the store armed."

[Asheville chief served near Buffalo mass shooting; talks response \(citizen-times.com\)
https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/2022/05/17/asheville-chief-served-near-buffalo-mass-shooting-talks-response/9793994002/](https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/2022/05/17/asheville-chief-served-near-buffalo-mass-shooting-talks-response/9793994002/)

Asheville chief served 33 yrs. near Buffalo mass shooting; says response big concern

[Joel Burgess](#)

ASHEVILLE - Before his job as this city's police chief, David Zack served 33 years in a town just minutes from the site of Buffalo's recent mass shooting, an allegedly racially motivated horror about which Zack spoke to the Citizen Times on May 16, describing concerns about officer response time, his own experience with a shooting and whether local police are prepared.

Zack, 59, was hired Feb. 4, 2020, by City Manager Debra Campbell to lead the Asheville Police Department. Before that, he worked more than three decades as an officer in Cheektowaga, New York, just east of Buffalo. He spent the last of nine years there as Cheektowaga's chief.

In the May 14 shooting, [Payton S. Gendron](#), 18, who is white, is reported to have driven hours to an area with a high minority population where he intended to murder Black people. Ten people were killed and three wounded. Eleven were Black.

Note: This interview was edited for clarity and length.

Asheville Citizen Times: After working and living so long in that part of New York, do you know anyone who was involved in the shooting?

David Zack: I'm very, very close to the police commissioner out there, Joe Gramaglia. As a matter of fact, he and I were just together a couple of weeks ago at this seminar at Harvard. Now, all I've been doing is just sending the commissioner well wishes and telling him his team's doing a great job, but I don't want to bother him right now. I can only imagine what they're dealing with. Just the chaos, and of course now you've got the president, and so forth coming in.

CT: Have you dealt with any kind of similar shooting?

Zack: We had one guy, Travis Green, in 2017, fire 20 shots into a Dollar General store. Fortunately, only one person was hit (and wounded). We took him into custody by tackling him. He dropped the gun and ran. There were a lot of mental health issues and things like that. And there were similarities to this shooting. He came in wearing body armor and had hundreds of rounds in the car.

CT: Did anything change in the way you responded to shootings?

Zack: What it boils down to is, what is your active shooter protocol and what is your training? I like to say, in my former agency, we were right on the cutting edge of that active shooter response. Because that training evolved over time. With Columbine, it was: go in with hunt teams, go in with rescue teams, things like that — wait for three and four officers to respond before you make an entry. The tactics were very slow-moving. We learned quickly through our training and our experience that, no, you have just got to engage.

CT: Why is that?

Zack: Because as these events started to unfold over time, you would see that, once the police got on scene, No. 1, you're diverting the attention of the shooter away from potential targets and towards police. But also, a lot of times, when the police get on scene, the shooter takes their own life — or they barricade themselves in somewhere. So, I can tell you in our Dollar General case, when the guy was out in the parking lot shooting and heard the sirens of the police cars, he laid the gun down and started running.

CT: With 10 people killed in Buffalo, did police not get there fast enough?

Zack: Oh, no. They were there in less than two minutes. And you had the security guard (former Buffalo police officer Aaron Salter) on scene, who engaged. I understand he hit the shooter but the shooter was wearing body armor. And then, of course, the gunman, killed him. So speed is everything. I brought this up in (the City Council) Public

Safety Committee here with us being down on staffing and one of the things we're very, very concerned about is our ability to respond. Seconds mean everything. Seconds save lives.

CT: That's a lot of ask of a police officer or anybody, to immediately engage a shooter.

Zack: Yeah. I think you saw the same thing last year in the [Boulder, Colorado, shooting](#), where the cop (Eric Talley) went into the supermarket. He was first officer on scene and he was killed. And that pretty much ended the event. It's a selfless act to go in. You know, but that's what we're trained to do. And that's what you want to see officers doing. There was the case in Florida where the deputy (Scot Peterson) didn't go into the Parkland school during the shooting.

CT: How does the availability of firearms play into these shootings?

Zack: New York State has some of the toughest gun laws in the country. So you can make that argument both ways.

CT: What do you mean both ways?

Zack: It's not the firearm that did the killing. It's the shooter that did the killing, the individual, a severely mentally ill person with a lot of hate in their heart and extremist views. Even with the toughest gun laws, he still was able to get his hands on a firearm.

And let's face it, what stopped the shooting or prevented more deaths, was that there was somebody inside the store armed.

CT: Can 'red flag' laws help? (Such laws allow court-ordered temporary removal of guns after petitioning by police or family.)

Zack: I think they can be helpful when properly applied in certain situations. But you're still at the end of the day dealing with that severe mental health issue and hate. This is someone who had made threats prior. And when we have an individual like that, that we know is dangerous, how do we remove them from society? And literally we weren't able to, and he was able to carry this out. So, it really starts there, with hate, and a very broken mental health system.

CT: What about locally, do we track hate crimes and those who we think might commit them?

Zack: We do an annual hate crime report that is turned into the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation which is in turn forwarded to the FBI. There were eight reports submitted to the SBI in 2021: three in June, two in July, two in October, and one in December.

CT: Are you concerned about something like this happening here?

Zack: I think it's something we prepare for. It's something we train for and it's something we are equipped for. You know, my biggest concern right now with the depletion of staff is response time. So, you can never say, "It will never happen here." You hope and pray that it won't. But I know that people of Buffalo never thought it would happen there. It's my job to be prepared for all possible situations and outcomes. And again, that's why we train, that's why we equip and that's why we practice, in the event something like this does happen.

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