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Seal Beach Survives Tragedy With Strength

A community's timbre is tested by tragedy.

Seal Beach was sorely tested last week. And the community's strength came to the forefront.

Seal Beach's police department was faced with an unthinkable situation when the 9-1-1 call came in that shots had been fired at Salon Meritage. The small department had not been forced to handle a single homicide in the last year — now they faced a shooting that would make national, even international, news.

They got the job done, and with an understated professionalism that deserves praise. That started with the arrest of the suspect just minutes away from the scene.

Who hasn't seen the home video capturing the arrest? It's difficult to imagine what went through these officers' minds as they confronted Scott Dekraai. It's doubtful they knew the extent of Dekraai's rampage, but clearly they knew he was violent. They kept their cool, and were able to complete the arrest without incident (thankfully, Dekraai offered no resistance).

Back at the shooting scene,

that same professionalism was in evidence in different ways. The larger law enforcement community came when called to assist, with officers and investigators from multiple jurisdictions on the scene within minutes. But it was the Seal Beach PD's responsibility, and they handled it.

Special mention must be made of Sgt. Steve Bowles. Bowles acts as Seal Beach's public information officer in addition to his regular duties, and he was the man who first faced the mob of print, radio and television reporters anxious to tell the story.

Bowles was professional start to finish — offering all the information he had, refusing to speculate about things he didn't know and patiently and politely answering questions even when they had been asked before. It took a whisper from a firefighter to allow Bowles to end that first very difficult press conference.

Moreover, Bowles conveyed the caring of the community for the victims, the shock and grief being shared. It was the first indication of how the entire community would come together to support one another.

That first Wednesday afternoon, pastors and counselors rushed to the scene to help console, to offer assistance in gathering information. Pastor Don Shoemaker of Grace Community Church did his duty as the chaplain of the Seal Beach Police Department, and was joined by fellow clergy from all of Seal Beach's other churches in an effort to ease the pain, or at least help express the sorrow.

Support certainly wasn't limited to clergy. Staff members from the churches, the city government, the chamber and just plain friends stepped up to help. Many people forget that details of life

don't go away when tragedies strike, and these folks quietly helped make sure that children were cared for, food was prepared, communication continued.

Stress for supporters hasn't abated in the last week. The victims' families continue to need help, and the community now enters the grieving and questioning period of memorials and trying to move on.

While the television cameras and newspaper photographers soon will stop coming to Seal Beach, the pain and sorrow will remain, and the need for comfort and assistance will continue.

Just like a town trying to recover from a tornado or other natural disaster, it will take time for Seal Beach to return to a semblance of normal life.

Our hearts go out to the victims of this senseless tragedy and their families. In truth, all of Seal Beach is a victim here.

Our gratitude goes out to those many professionals and friends who have stepped up to help, and who will continue to provide that support in the days and weeks to come. You have shown the timbre of the community.

That timbre is strong, and will grow stronger through this sad experience. Thank you.