

# Other Voices: New Police Chief Gets Praise by Community Activist But “Crime and Fear” Still Exist

*The Oxnard Police Department is no stranger to controversy, including several fatal shootings by police officers which drew a lot of criticism by many in the community.*



*In 2014, the city of Oxnard had to pay \$6.7 million to settle the wrongful death lawsuit filed by Alfonso Limon Jr.'s family which is the largest wrongful death settlement the city of Oxnard has paid.*

*A 2001 [Los Angeles Times](#) analysis stated that Oxnard police have fatally shot more people in the first eight months of 2001 than peace officers in many U.S. states and major American cities kill in an entire year.*

*The article stated that Oxnard's five police homicides this year equal the number reported since January by the Los Angeles Police Department, whose jurisdiction is 22 times larger than the 170,000-resident Ventura County city.*

*The city of Oxnard hired a new police chief, Scott Whitney, after former police chief Jeri Williams left to become Phoenix's new police chief.*

*Whitney, who is the assistant city manager of Oxnard, will head a department with 230 sworn officers. The 25-year police veteran and Oxnard native is 50 years old. He will begin his new job with the police department later this month.*

*Here, Armando Vazquez, who is the executive director of Acuna Art Gallery/Café on A, writes about the city's new chief and praises the city's decision to name Whitney to head Oxnard's police force. But Vazquez said "crime and fear" still exist, and there is a lot of work to do.*

---

**By Armando Vazquez**

We at the Café on A have just learned, effective Sept. 16, 2016, that Scott Whitney has been named the new Police Chief of Oxnard.



The City of Oxnard's  
new Police Chief  
Scott Whitney

This is great news for the community of Oxnard! For close to two decades we have worked with Officer Whitney, and we have come to know from our long working relationship that he is honest, hardworking, empathetic, intelligent, street-trained/street-smart, a straight talker, inclusive; the consummate professional, a local caring cop who knows and loves Oxnard.

Scott Whitney is one of those rare individuals who pursued his profession with passion, empathy and intelligence and never let his ego or professional aspirations taint his judgement.

Scott never lost his way as a cop, even when all hell was breaking loose in the OPD which has in the past at times, lost its way!

Whenever Officer Whitney dealt with us at the Café on A on often sensitive, heated and contentious safety, enforcement and delinquency issues with youth and their families we found him to be smart, thoughtful, caring; a proactive law enforcement officer and problem solver.

Over the years we have worked on many very delicate crime, safety and social justices' issues and situations and Officer Whitney has always made it a personal mission to listen, stay professionally objective and dedicatedly work with us to craft out equitable and fair resolutions for our community.

The Café on A. through its KEYS Leadership Academy, has worked with thousands of at-risk, troubled and disenfranchised youth and their families for over two decades.

In this period we have been witnesses to the often heavy handed tactics deployed by the OPD in its application of it often ill-advised tough on crime tactics and programs promulgated and sanctioned by the previous four (4) OPD Chiefs that many have suffered through here in Oxnard over the past two decades.



On many of these questionable community law enforcement policies , the Café on A opposed and fought the OPD openly and assertively, demanding more accountability, transparency and fairness, and equitable justice.

The Café on A and our community friends fought against the Civil Gang Injunctions, the sobriety check stops, introduction of cops in both elementary and high schools of Oxnard, the OPD working with ICE, youth and minority profiling, quasi-operation and management of PALS and other “social services” programs; and other questionable programs that the previous OPD Chiefs created and championed for apparent career and self-serving purposes.

We at the Café on A challenged the OPD to work on overhauling its so called community- policing programs, to be good at being professional cops and not lousy or questionable mixed focus as social workers.

We have demanded that the OPD vastly improve its obligatory mandate, to stop crime and serve all of Oxnard community.



We challenged the OPD to be true community servants and to do real community policing and not just show case "community policing" as a pathetic mindless public relations ploy of cover ups, whenever a PR need occurred.

The past four Oxnard Police Chiefs, and their unsuccessful policies we have known and tried to work, with are now gone, but crime and fear in Oxnard is here and ticking back up.

Chief Whitney has a chance to create a new vision for the OPD; a professional police department that serves the community, works with the community and helps create a compassionate progressive environment where cops and community are working together; not as surrogates or rats but as equal partners in the pursuit of an enlightened community safety paradigm.

We know many residents, especially youth of color, of Oxnard that do not trust the OPD and for good reason!

Conversely there are those residents of Oxnard that want the cops to be even tougher; as though brutish toughness by OPD cops, at the expense of mostly youth of color will bring about community safety and security to fearful hearts and minds.

Policing in America, in Oxnard, is a daunting often paradoxical job, as we have witnessed on a national and local level. We have all witnessed and perhaps experienced that rabidly blind tough on crime policing can lead to tragic and deadly consequences.



I have worked in the trenches of disenfranchised Los Angeles and Ventura County communities for over 50 years, attempting; always attempting to work with cops and to help them serve our disenfranchised communities.

It has been an impossibly difficult task because the rank and file cops follow the "blue code" of conduct (as the Police Chiefs work on bolstering their political capital and careers with statistical law enforcement numbers, i.e., arrest, tickets, infractions, confiscations of property rule the day). In the "blue code" of policing true community policing is often hypocritical sloganeering.

We are sure that Chief Scott Whitney is an honest and highly intelligent cop, a hard working career professional and is the best man to lead the OPD.

Nonetheless, Chief Whitney has a daunting job before him; namely bring the OPD into the 21<sup>st</sup> century of community policing. Some Oxnard residents have suffered tremendous injustices at the hands of the OPD in recent years.

Fear of crime, both real and imagined, has driven previous OPD Chiefs to militarize some parts of Oxnard; an us against them mentality has resulted from this "war on crime" philosophy.

Chief Whitney has partnered with the Café on A and other community-based organizations that work with youth delinquency for close to two decades; he has always been a man of his word and a good cop, that understands that compassion often works better than robotic force.

Many times, in the past, we have turned to Scott for help in a time of need, and he has always done his personal and professionally diligent best to assist.

Congratulations, Scott!

We know that you are equal to the tough tasks ahead of you,

and we at the Café on A are ready, willing and able to work with you hand in hand to bring compassionate, intelligent restorative justice to youth, their families and the entire wonderfully diverse city of Oxnard. Let us know how we can help.

**Armando Vazquez, M.Ed.**

**Executive Director, Acuna Art Gallery/Café on A**

**Executive Director, The KEYS Leadership Academy**

**Chairman, of the Oxnard Multicultural Mental Health /coalition**