

Police Chief Speech (Follow)
Patrick Harwood
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Police Chief Asks Reporters to be More Sensitive to Victims

By Patrick Harwood

Reporters should give more thought to the negative impact their stories may have on victims and their families, Charleston's police chief said Monday.

"I hope reporters have enough humanity not to get caught up in the competitive practices of the business and realize how they may hurt others," Chief Barry Kopperud said in a speech to the local chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists at the Blackhawk Hotel.

Kopperud described the relationship between police and the news media as "symbiotic, co-dependent, love-hate." The chief used the speech to local journalists to discuss "points of friction" that he said arise from time to time between the two groups.

To illustrate his point, Kopperud cited recent local crimes and incidents in which he said he believes the news media acted improperly or unethically:

- A few weeks ago a retired police dog bit its handler's daughter who required stitches. Kopperud says he and the girl's parents didn't want her to know that the dog then had to be put down. A reporter who learned of the incident accused police officials, who refused to discuss the matter, of trying to hide from possible embarrassment which was not true at all, according to the chief.
- As another example of how he contends the feelings of a family may outweigh the public's right to know, Kopperud said how this newspaper reported the recent suffocation death of a College of Charleston student due to autoerotic asphyxiation. "How crass," Kopperud said he thought of the paper's decision to include details of the unusual sex-related death. "Imagine how that must have made the student's mother and father feel."
- The chief also criticized a local radio station for airing "the gory details"

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about the death of another College of Charleston student, Wendy Ray. Within hours of telling her parents that he would soon get back to them about the circumstances of their daughter's death, they heard the "grisly" details instead on the radio, according to Kopperud. "I can't tell you how devastated the Rays were," he said.

"I guess the moral of these stories is a simple one," Kopperud said. "People are really affected by news stories."

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