

A SENTINEL-VOICE EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH LV METRO POLICE SGT. TOM KELLER

By Muhammad Abdullah

The following is a SENTINEL-VOICE exclusive interview with Sergeant Tom Keller of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. Sergeant Keller is a recruiter and spoke with this reporter at the "Public Safety Career Fair and Exposition" held at the Cashman Field Complex on Saturday, August 15, 1992.

In the following interview Sgt. Keller will answer questions on police community relations, the Rodney King aftermath and Ice T's album, "Cop Killer," as they relate to the career fair and improving the public's perception of law enforcement officials in general.

ABDULLAH: "I'm sure you are aware of the Rodney King incident; many would argue that it was not an "isolated" incident but something that perhaps takes place daily throughout America, and the violence that ensued needed a "spark." Is it your hope

the this "career fair" will create better police/community relations?"

KELLER: "Yes... This year we tried getting away from the "career fair" and getting more into the "public safety" area. We hoped this year to have more of our details and bureaus out here. We hope to get more people out to the fair. In getting the people out to the fair, getting the people talking not just to the recruiters but to different officers because they know that the recruiters are talking about better police/community relations. We want to get the people talking to some of the officers who work the streets; we have a lot of our bike patrol people around. In talking to the patrol officers as well as other civilians, they will find that these officers, just because they wear that yellow and black uniform, you know, and they will get a chance to talk to some of the detectives, because a lot of times

people have a perception of police officers and it is not necessarily what reality is.

It will give them a chance to talk to each other and hopefully they can talk to them not only about "recruiting" but also about their jobs and themselves and it will give them an opportunity to interact on a one-to-one basis and that is the other hope that we're having. Especially in today's time with the Rodney King incident and the tension we've felt locally."

ABDULLAH: "What attempts have been made specifically to address that negative perception that the public has of Metro, particularly as it relates to minorities and the ratio of minorities to white officers?"

KELLER: "In terms of trying to close the gap between minorities at the police department, the Sheriff has some programs going, we're talking about problem oriented policing, commu-

nity oriented policing which gets people to work more and the community to work more with the policemen, not on the one-side-versus-the-other-side, but more on a one-on-one and a work-together relationship, because that's what community based policing is all about. In terms of hiring, we have directed much of our hiring advertisements towards the minority community.

"We shot a T.V. commercial with Michael Winslow; he is a black actor from the Police Academy series, and we have some posters coming out, where you will see many of the black officers and we're advertising in the SENTINEL-VOICE newspaper. In fact, we had an ad come out just last week. We're trying to advertise more in minority geared areas.

We're telling people in our advertisements that we are looking for minorities and females. We understand that we have to represent the community that we work in. So by doing that, then we will have better representation in the community that we're in because we will reflect that community. We must realize that the police and the community are not on two separate sides. We have to work together.

It's hard because you'll hear people say; "Well, the police did this or the police did that. Things like the Rodney King beating do make it look bad for everybody, but I think what the community must understand is that those are isolated incidents. I wasn't there, so I should not be blamed

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for that. But if we are going to deal with the drug problem or the crime problem, we have to work together because the police can't do it alone, everyone has to come together and work together.

ABDULLAH: How do you as a police officer respond to Ice T's lyrics in the "Cop Killer" album? Are you concerned that it may spark more violence or polarization? Is the department concerned?"

KELLER: I can't give you the police department's opinion, or it's stand because I don't know. Obviously there are some officers that were concerned and some that were upset about it. I saw some literature going around. We have to recognize,

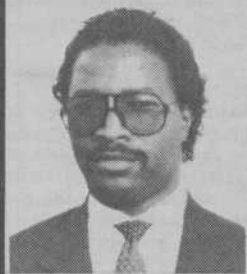
all of us, that there is the "freedom of speech," and the "freedom of the press."

ABDULLAH: Ice T made a reference on the "Arsenio Hall Show" how actor Arnold Swarzenegger in the movie "Terminator" wiped out police officers in a bloody battle scene in his movie and nothing was said, I'm sure there are other examples. How would you respond to this?"

KELLER: I think what it is, is that a small group of people make a stink about something, and the next thing you know, it's blown out of proportion.

If you'll remember, there was a very popular song years ago called "I Shot The Sheriff," and it was a Top 40 hit and no one made a stink about that."

I don't think that the department had an official stance, but with officers, it would depend on who you asked. A lot of the problem, I think, was some of the side comments that Ice T made regarding killing cops. There was some T.V. coverage on private video that he shot and said things about cops and I think that's what upset a lot of people."



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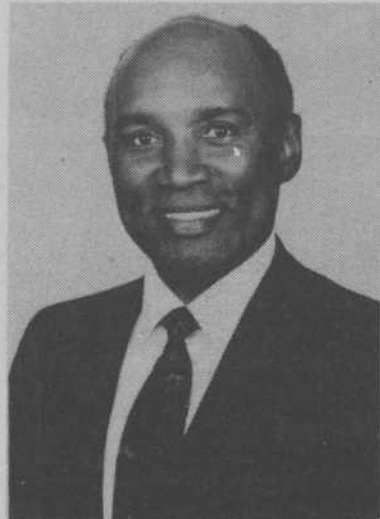
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