

Progress in the Long Game of Making Rockford a Safer Community

It's been an exceptionally busy year and I appreciate the *Rockford Register Star* giving me space for a two-part column. First I'll share a brief review of 2018 for the City of Rockford and then a look ahead to 2019 in an upcoming column.

My top priority as mayor is public safety. Nothing is more important to me, my team and the City Council than keeping our community safe. We have faced challenges with crime for many years and have taken aggressive action to stem this tide since I took office 19 months ago.

Our Police Department is now authorized for more than 300 sworn officers for the first time in 10 years. Chief Dan O'Shea and his command team have built a department based on engagement—building trust with the community leads both to safer neighborhoods and better response when crime does happen.

With the support of Council, we've also allocated several million dollars in additional funding to the department in the last two years to provide more technology, training and resources to our officers. We've built stronger relationships with our local, state and federal law enforcement partners, yielding major arrests on significant criminal operations.

With domestic violence accounting for nearly 35 percent of our violent crime, we moved quickly to establish the Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence & Human Trafficking Prevention. We're educating the public, building partnerships and providing resources to tackle this epidemic, which cuts across all facets of our community. We won a \$450,000 federal grant to begin the hard work of establishing a Family Justice Center, a one-stop location for survivors and families to get the services they need.

What are our efforts yielding? Progress. We ended 2017 down 5 percent in violent crime and 8 percent down in property crime. Year to date 2018 through November, we are down 11 percent in violent crime, 15 percent in robbery, down 19 percent in shots fired and 11 percent in aggravated assault. However, homicides are up in 2018 and within those incidents, we've seen a spike in domestic-related homicides.

My team and I know that we're not nearly where we need to be or want to be. Our work to make Rockford safer is a long game. It's a marathon. Not a sprint. Behind those statistics are people who deserve to live, work, learn and play in a community that's safe. We face significant challenges with drug trafficking and gang activity causing much of our violent crime. These incidents are often targeted and not random—I agree with Chief O'Shea's frequent statements that associating with violent people puts you at much greater risk of being a crime victim.

I'm asked often what it will take to reduce Rockford's crime rate. I answer honestly and clearly that there's no single item or initiative that will solve our crime challenges. Anyone who tells you otherwise is uninformed and doesn't understand the complexity of the issues we face as a community. The brave men and women of our police department devote countless hours preventing and responding to crime. They can't do it alone—we all play a role in keeping our community safe.

As we look back on 2018, I'm pleased with the progress we're making in public safety. However, I'm restless that we're not moving fast enough. My team and I continue to work tirelessly to help build a better and safer city for you and the next generation. I look forward to sharing some plans we have for 2019 in the second part of this column.

Thomas P. McNamara is Mayor of Rockford