

Chief Butler Honoree for Restorative Justice Work

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Daily Times-Call
Tuesday, September 27, 2005

Longmont-Ford Police Chief Mike Butler, justice does not mean locking someone up and throwing away the key.

For years, Butler has promoted the use of restorative justice so offenders can meet with and compensate victims for their wrongdoing.

Recently, the advocates of restorative justice honored Butler with a national award for his support of the concept in general and specifically through the Longmont Community Justice Partnership.

The Forum on Restorative Community Justice presented the 2005 Virginia Mackey leadership Award to Butler during its conference in Estes Park.

"He has really led the way in Boulder County with this," said Beverly Title, a founder of the Longmont Community Justice Partnership. His support of the program when it began in 1997 was vital, she said. "I'm not sure we would have survived without him."

Hal Nees, who supervised Butler when both worked for the Boulder Police Department, presented Butler with the award.

"The intent was to recognize Mike for his role in implementing restorative justice in Longmont," Nees said.

Butler's advocacy of community policing and involving the community in the justice process dates back to at least 1978, when Nees met him, Nees said.

"When he was with Boulder, he was always community-oriented," Nees said.

For Butler, though, the award reflects more on the Longmont community than it does on him.

"The award is indicative and symbolic of how our police department and this community has embraced restorative justice," Butler said.

Anne Rogers, executive director of the Forum on Restorative Community Justice, said Butler stands out because of his commitment to the community.

"Mike stood out for a long time," Rogers said. Not many law enforcement officers are visionaries for the relationship between community policing and restorative justice, as Butler is, she added.

Although other law enforcement officers support restorative justice, Butler is more enthusiastic than most.

"It's fairly rare that they are as fervent in their efforts as he is," said Title, who won the annual award in 2001.

Butler has developed partnerships between the Longmont Community Justice Partnership and the Longmont City Council, and the Longmont Police Department and others in the criminal justice system, Rogers said.

"He models that and has for years," she said.

The award was named for Virginia Mackey, one of the founders of the Forum on Restorative Community Justice. Mackey died of cancer in 2001.

"We really wanted her work and the memory of who she was and what she stood for to be remembered," Rogers said.