Jen Maser:

Hello and welcome back to the ’Cuse Conversations podcast. I’m Jen Maser, associate director of internal communications at Syracuse University.

Chief Craig Stone:

I've stressed this to my staff and my leadership team that it's important that we do our part to make sure we create and maintain an environment that is safe and everyone has a positive experience, feels valued, and that they belong at Syracuse University. Therefore, as an organization, we must promote a culture of respecting and valuing diversity equity, inclusion and accessibility. Also, it's important for us to be good listeners and display empathy in our interactions with the community.

Jen Maser:

Our guest today is Craig Stone, chief of campus safety and emergency management services. Chief Stone began his tenure with the University in April of this year, bringing with him decades of experience as a police officer and a respected leader of both city and campus public safety teams. He now oversees the Department of Public Safety, also known as DPS, which encompasses law enforcement and community policing, fire and life safety, and emergency management services on campus. As we head into Syracuse Welcome and prepare to have thousands and thousands of students return for the 2022-23 academic year, we are very excited to have Chief Stone as our guest here on ’Cuse Conversations.

So for my first question, we'll start with a nice softball down the middle. Tell me a little bit about your background and your career path prior to joining the team here at Syracuse.

Chief Craig Stone:

Well, Jen, first, thanks for inviting me to the program. I have a master's degree in administration of justice from the University of Louisville and I served four years as an adjunct professor and subject matter expert at Franklin University in Columbus, Ohio. Plus, I have over 37 years of public safety experience, which includes over 29 years of service with the Columbus Division of Police, I retired as a lieutenant, and my higher ed experience, I served as director of campus safety and chief of police at Cleveland State University, chief of police at the Ohio State University.

Chief Craig Stone:

Executive director of public safety and chief of police for the University Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In the last two years, I served as deputy director of public safety for the city of Columbus, and I'm also a team lead assessor for the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies Inc., and I've been doing that for 18 years.

Jen Maser:

Wow. That's quite an impressive resume. Did you always know you wanted to go into law enforcement and become a police officer? Did you fall into it? How did you get started on your career path?

Chief Craig Stone:

Good question. Growing up, I had no desire to be a police officer, never thought about it. In the fourth grade, I did serve as safety patrol, and I enjoyed it.

Jen Maser:

There you go.

Chief Craig Stone:

But Columbus had a big recruitment drive in the early '80s and it caught my attention and I started asking questions of three police officers that I came to become familiar with to learn about the profession. I had a desire to help people and thought my integrity, character, communication skills, and physical abilities will be a good fit for a rewarding career as a police officer. All three of those officers encouraged me to apply and I'm still enjoying myself.

Jen Maser:

Good, good. I was on safety patrol, too. I never thought of that as a sort of a first step towards a career in law enforcement, so maybe I've missed the mark being here in communications.

Chief Craig Stone:

Well, you can still volunteer with us.

Jen Maser:

That's true. Maybe I'll have to look into that.

Chief Craig Stone:

Yes.

Jen Maser:

You joined the university in early April. I'm sure over the last four or five months, you've spent a lot of time just meeting people, getting acclimated to what's different about Syracuse University from some of the other places you've worked, learning about our campus and sort of how it's structured and how it operates. What, if anything, has stood out to you in these first four or five months on the job about Syracuse University?

Chief Craig Stone:

It is a special place. There are many opportunities for students to be involved and obtain hands-on experience at Syracuse University. I've been interviewed by the student-run media, The Daily Orange, and also Citrus TV. In addition, I have went on numerous ride-alongs with our peace officers and observed the Syracuse University Ambulance, which is a student-run organization responding to medical emergencies, helping other students, so it's very exciting to know that this is a special place where students can really get firsthand experience that they can take with them.

Jen Maser:

Yeah, absolutely. I know you've done a number of engagement opportunities for our students towards the end of the spring semester, and even over the summer, trying to get out there and get in front of people and get to know them, and that building community trust is a big priority for you as you step into

this new role. Can you tell me about some of the direct interactions you've had with students since joining?

Chief Craig Stone:

Sure. I came on board towards the end of the semester, but I was able to meet with David Bruen, president, and Adia Santos, vice president of the student association and Yousr Dhaouadi, the president of the Graduate Student Organization, so I look forward to working with their members and expanding our ability to be able to connect and communicate with them, their initiatives and our initiatives, promoting that dialogue and working together to keep the campus safe.

Chief Craig Stone:

Also, I've met with the community review board. I attended their public forum, offering support so they can carry out their duties, and I've attended meetings with the community review board leadership, which is led by Brianna Sclafani, she's the chair, she's also a graduate law student here, senior advisor Bea González, former vice president for community engagement and special assistant to the chancellor, and Tony Perez, expert law enforcement consultant.

Chief Craig Stone:

One of the things that we did at OSU U of I that we're going to bring here is a Community Police Academy. We're going to start that in the fall in October. That's going to be available for students, faculty, and staff. It's going to be a four-week program and they're going to learn more about us. We're going to learn more about them. It's going to be very interactive and fun and it will help us build trust and relationships and also build ambassadors. I believe once they get to know a little bit more how we operate, why we do what we do, they'll be more apt to call us when they see something that doesn't look right and looks suspicious, so we plan to host a Community Police Academy annually each fall and spring semesters. Also, we are accepting nominations for our Student of Color Advisory Board. This was implemented out of the Loretta Lynch report. I look forward to building those relationships and making sure everyone feels belonged and welcome here at the university.

Jen Maser:

That's incredible. Those sound like really good opportunities for not just students, but like you said, faculty and staff to get engaged as well. In the press release announcing your appointment as chief of campus safety, Gwenn Judge referred to you as “a genuine leader, a bridge builder, and an innovator.” That's what stuck out to her during the interview process. How do you think you exemplify those qualities?

Chief Craig Stone:

Well, Jen, I believe I demonstrated experience in leading high-performance work teams, getting results such as improving response times in calls for service, reducing crime, developing and mentoring personnel, increasing our community engagement efforts with our students, and so I look forward to bringing that energy here, and excited about Syracuse University. It's an awesome campus and I'm enjoying myself. So far, I have added 150 contacts to my cell phone, and I've conducted over 90 interviews with my personnel, but of course, I've done a lot of interviews with our internal and external stakeholders here at the university.

Jen Maser:

Speaking of external stakeholders, one of the questions I wanted to ask you about as we head into a new semester and a lot of first-year students coming in, whose parents are sending them off to college for the first time, Syracuse is in the middle of an urban city, it's a different experience for some folks depending on where they're coming from, so what would you tell the parent of an incoming first-year student about their students being safe on campus?

Chief Craig Stone:

Well, first of all, let them know we're a 24/7 operation. We don't close and our top priority is keeping the campus community safe. We also follow the best-recognized industry practices and are accredited by the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators, IACLEA, and accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc., CALEA, and we're certified as a National Weather Service as a storm-ready university.

Chief Craig Stone:

But also, I would like to go further to let the parents know that we have sworn police officers on campus that are highly visible, either on foot, on bike, or mobile patrol. We have community service officers that perform a variety of security and safety and community service duties associated with the protection of life and property.

Chief Craig Stone:

We also have something that's unique. We have residential campus safety officers that are stationed at the front desk of each residential hall to make sure that only the students that have IDs are getting in. Also, access to the residential halls require the students to swipe their IDs. Our Communications Center has trained dispatchers and call takers who answer emergency and non-emergency calls for service. As far as technology, we have over 150 blue light emergency phones on campus, and we have more than 2,100 security camera views on campus. We also have fire life safety inspectors, and they proactively conduct fire prevention, programming and conduct fire inspections.

Chief Craig Stone:

We also have an Orange Safe mobile safety app, which will roll out in the fall. Students can receive email, phone and text notifications and alerts. The app also has a Safe Walk feature. In addition, the University has a free shuttle service for our students as well. You mentioned how we work with our public safety partners and we have a great relationship with Syracuse Police, Syracuse Fire, the City of Syracuse, Onondaga County Sheriff's Office and also the New York State Police and the local FBI, so we work in partnership with them, but we want to make sure that our students are safe on and off campus.

Jen Maser:

Yeah. Wow, I feel safer about being here after hearing you list off all of those resources. What does creating a university that is inclusive and welcoming to all mean to you as the chief of campus safety? It's something we hear the Chancellor and the provost mention that we aspire to be that Syracuse University is inclusive and welcoming to all, so what does that mean in terms of policing and the work you do?

Chief Craig Stone:

Well, I've stressed this to my staff and my leadership team that it's important that we do our part to make sure we create and maintain an environment that is safe and everyone has a positive experience,

feels valued, and that they belong at Syracuse University. Therefore, as an organization, we must promote a culture of respecting and valuing diversity equity, inclusion and accessibility. Also, it's important for us to be good listeners and display empathy in our interactions with the community. From what I've observed so far, I'm very pleased with our personnel interacting with the campus community. They're very experienced and they slow things down, they explain things. Very happy to see that we are doing a good service to the campus community.

Jen Maser:

Are there any misperceptions or anything you would like to tell students whether they're incoming or returning about the Department of Public Safety that they might not be aware of, or misconceptions that you might be able to clear up?

Chief Craig Stone:

Well, I've heard from my team, and also reviewing the letter Loretta Lynch report, there are some misconceptions in regards to, I guess, some students feel we're just here to break up parties. That's not true. That's not true. I mean, most of the times, we're getting calls from neighbors about loud music complaints, and so that'll prompt a response. We want you to have a good time, we want you to party, but do it responsibly, and be respectful of your neighbors.

Another misconception is what is considered campus and/or Syracuse University property. We have a large footprint, but we go in and out of the city of Syracuse, so I think that might be a little confusing for some of the students. Once they've been around here a few years, I think they become more knowledgeable of the jurisdictional issues, but that's why we have an MOU with the city, and we work with them to navigate that process.

Jen Maser:

Looking forward, what do you hope to accomplish during your tenure as chief here on campus at Syracuse University? How do you think you can innovate, process improve, do things to make SU a better place?

Chief Craig Stone:

Well, Jen, in my first email, division-wide, I wanted to keep it simple, so I laid out three goals for the direction of our organization. Number one, keeping the campus community safe, number two, increasing our community engagement with our students, and three, we want to maintain accreditation and seek advanced accreditation.

Chief Craig Stone:

To drill down further for you, we conducted a SWOT analysis, strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Now, we're in the process of developing a five-year strategic plan, and we're going to be assisted in that process by Dr. Jerry Edmonds, assistant provost academic affairs, and also, he's enlisted assistance from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment is going to help us and guide us through that process.

Chief Craig Stone:

But to answer your question, the things I want to accomplish as chief, I want to continue to maintain a safe campus. I want to accelerate our team development. For example, I want to prepare people for

future leadership responsibilities. I want to provide personnel opportunities for growth and development when we talk about community engagement with our students, so I'm looking to expand our formal and informal interactions with our students through education and crime prevention efforts, so hosting a Community Police Academy each fall and spring is one goal, and also wanted to expand our outreach and provide a week-long summer youth leadership camp for rising ninth graders in the City of Syracuse. I think it's important to build relationships with the community at large, let those rising ninth graders know what opportunities are available here at the University, prepare them for life skills, prepare them for the ninth grade, and our personnel can serve as mentors and chaperones during that week-long program. I'm also interested in increasing our outreach and interaction with minority groups and developing a comprehensive educational program.

Chief Craig Stone:

We don't want to be stagnant. We want to constantly assess and evaluate what we do. For example, Christine Weber, our public information officer, George Wazen, he's one of the leaders in our community engagement, we're working on, what can we do to help welcome international students, students of color, or first-year freshmen, how can we partner with our other entities on campus to help welcome those first-year freshmen students?

Chief Craig Stone:

Thirdly, I got it narrowed down real short, we want to get re-certified as a storm-ready university by National Weather Service this year. Next year, obtain ICALEA reaccreditation, and then obtain advanced accreditation through CALEA in 2024.

Jen Maser:

Wow. Very ambitious. That's incredible in terms of both the student engagement side and all of the accreditation stuff. I believe I saw in the spring semester, did you host some sort of game night where you were playing video games with students, or something like that? Is that coming back in the fall?

Chief Craig Stone:

Well, I'm not good at those type of games, but we do have some officers here that are actually pretty good, and they enjoy doing that. That's a different way of interacting with the students. We did participate in a dodgeball tournament. We didn't do too well in that, but the students were pretty good.

Jen Maser:

You've got some years on them, but we won't hold it against you.

Chief Craig Stone:

Right.

Jen Maser:

I know you mentioned the Orange Safe app, which is a way that students can stay safe on campus, something they can download with a robust list of resources in there. What are other tips or strategies for students to stay safe on campus? I know we always send out emails, reminding them to lock their dorm rooms, and lock up their bikes and things like that, but if you just wanted to list a few ways that people can stay safe.

Chief Craig Stone:

Well, Jen, you're pretty smart. You're following down the right path. Thanks for reading those alerts that we sent out. We believe that crime prevention and education are the key to preventing and deterring crime, so I think one of the three things, number one would be securing your belongings, for example, lock your doors and windows when you're leaving your residence. Don't make it easy for somebody to break into your apartment or your residence hall. If you have a bike on campus, do not use cheap locks like cable locks or chain locks because they can easily be cut and defeated. Instead, use U-Bolt locks, which are harder to defeat. When studying on campus, don't walk away and leave your cell phone, laptop, personal items, unattended, even if it's just for a minute. Take care of your belongings.

Chief Craig Stone:

Also, when students go out, go out in groups, make sure everyone comes back together. Leave no one behind. That's very important. We want the students to have a good time and enjoy themselves, but don't meet somebody on social media, have a date with somebody, and you don't know this person, or you get separated at nightclub, or a party. No, go back with the group you came with. Everybody comes back together. I think that's very important.

Chief Craig Stone:

Then number three, help DPS keep Syracuse University safe, so participate in your community, report anything suspicious, and the phone number is 315.443.2224. I'll repeat that. The number is 315.443.2224.

Jen Maser:

Right. In the case of a true emergency, we would still encourage students to call 911, right?

Chief Craig Stone:

You got it. 911.

Jen Maser:

Perfect. If you're up for it, I have just a few rapid-fire questions to help to get to know you a little bit better as a person. Are you down?

Chief Craig Stone:

Let's do it.

Jen Maser:

All right. Who is one person who inspires you and why?

Chief Craig Stone:

Wow. That was probably my former chief at Columbus Police, Chief James G. Jackson. He served over 50 years. At the time, he was the longest-serving chief of a major city in the U.S., 19 years. He served in the Marines, Korean War, and he was very concerned about making sure we provided the best service to the public that we could. I was a staff inspections lieutenant and I stayed in that position for 10 years because of my loyalty to the chief. I could have had opportunity to transfer to other units, but I was loyal to him, and I learned a lot from him.

Chief Craig Stone:

We had conversations on a weekly basis. He wanted to know how the officers were doing, he wanted to know what was actually happening out there. As a staff inspector, I was his eyes and ears. I was the compliance person to check in to see, are we doing what we say we're doing? I learned a lot about his decision-making process and how he put the safety of the community first among all things. That's carried on with me through my career as being a leader, that safety is non-negotiable. I'm willing to negotiate and discuss any other subject, but safety of the campus community, that's of upmost, it's non-negotiable.

Jen Maser:

Yeah. I mean, he sounds incredible. I can tell even from this brief conversation how his leadership mentality has sort of infused the way you look at things as you take on this new role. Second one is what is one food you could eat for the rest of your life and not get sick of?

Chief Craig Stone:

I'm about to say pizza. I love pizza.

Jen Maser:

Right, you can't go wrong with pizza. Same. Are you a cat person, a dog person, or neither, or both?

Chief Craig Stone:

Neither.

Jen Maser:

Not an animal guy. They take a lot of time to take care of, so it's probably best that you're on campus, keeping everybody else safe rather than worrying about your pets at home.

Chief Craig Stone:

That's right.

Jen Maser:

What's one hobby you spend time on outside of work?

Chief Craig Stone:

I used to be an avid runner. I would run, any type of weather. I'm talking snow, ice, heat, extreme heat, I would do it, I would push myself to the limits. But now, I'm speed walking. I've been Onondaga Lake, Green Lakes State Park. I've also challenged myself and went up Adams Street and Skytop Road, so yeah, I enjoy being out in enjoying the environment and the beauty of Central New York.

Jen Maser:

Yeah. Well, when you factor in all the hills around the Syracuse Area, I think the speed walking counts as running. Cause it gets your heart rate up when you're trekking up those hills.

Chief Craig Stone:

I can almost touch my toes walking up Adams.

Jen Maser:

Yeah, exactly. Last question, and you don't have to say anything, but will Syracuse University have a snow day this year?

Chief Craig Stone:

Whew. I'm going to say no. I understand we have a great team in Facilities that does an awesome job of clearing the roads, the sidewalks, steps. I heard that we got a fantastic crew, and so I'm looking forward to the Dome. Hey, the show goes on. We got a roof, we got A/C now, so we're rolling.

Jen Maser:

Yeah. All right, no snow days here. You heard it here first, folks. Well, thank you, Chief Stone. This has been an amazing conversation. Any last thoughts you want to add or anything you want to say that we haven't gotten to?

Chief Craig Stone:

Yeah, I'm looking forward to meeting everyone. You see our personnel, stop and say hello. Very excited to be here. Go Orange.

Jen Maser:

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