

FROM GOLF COURSE TO WEIGHT ROOM

Satter relishes one last day of preps before beginning Bison football, SPORTS, B1

The Forum

OF FARGO HEAD

TUESDAY, JUNE 9, 2020

INFORUM.COM

LATE EDITION



Photos by C.S. Hagen / The Forum

Former Deputy Chief Todd Osmundson talks Sunday, June 7, about why he went undercover during the Fargo Marches for George Floyd protest and ensuing riot on May 30.

'BUILT-IN BIAS'

Former deputy chief offers scathing criticism of FPD after resigning under cloud

By C.S. Hagen
cshagen@forumcomm.com

Fargo

Everyone wants their pound of flesh when it comes to former Deputy Police Chief Todd "Ozzy" Osmundson. Or at least that's how he tells it.

Under pressure from the public eye, his boss suspended him. Fellow officers turned on him. Some Black Lives Matter activists demand criminal charges against him.

This all started after Osmundson went

undercover reportedly without permission on May 30 during the Fargo Marches for George Floyd protest and the ensuing downtown riot. He received a one-week suspension from the Fargo Police Department, and he subsequently resigned Thursday, June 4.

Osmundson, a deputy chief since 2006, knows he's being scrutinized for "copaganda," or the image of him supporting peaceful protesters in the afternoon of May 30

while in uniform, only to dress in plainclothes and infiltrate rioters' ranks later that night.

"Everyone is asking for my head," Osmundson told The Forum. "Black Lives Matter wants my head, and the police department is coming apart. The community is in an uproar, and we need to keep the city from burning down."

The 31-year veteran cop is now speaking out, saying long-term, "deep-seated" biases that area police officers have

toward people of color need to change.

With about 180 Fargo police officers focused on enforcement, and only four in community policing, monies aren't being spent wisely, he said. "We invest millions into the enforcement aspect to keep crime down, but just a tiny bit to gain the trust of young guys. We need to flip that," Osmundson said.

The Forum contacted Mayor Tim Mahoney

BIAS: Page A5

Black Lives Matter alleges undercover officer was part of illegal mission

Fargo police: No truth to allegations

By C.S. Hagen and Patrick Springer
Forum staff reporters

FARGO — Members of Black Lives Matter are calling for an independent review of the conduct of a Fargo police officer who went undercover to infiltrate the march the group organized in support of civil rights and George Floyd here on May 30.

A spokesman for the group said members have reason to believe that the officer, former Deputy Chief Todd Osmundson, donned plain clothes and marched undercover with the knowledge and support of Chief David Todd.

Todd has said Osmundson acted without authorization when he pretended to be a sympathizer of the group and placed him on unpaid leave for a week, then Osmundson resigned from the force last week.

"It is our belief that the former deputy chief was made to be a scapegoat and the problems are deeper," said Wess Philome, a spokesman for Black Lives Matter. "Lady Justice is marching in the streets. She has made her way to Fargo."

The allegations were delivered Monday, June 8, from the gazebo at Island Park, which Black Lives Matter has nicknamed "Justice Island," the scene of protests in recent weeks spurred by the death of Floyd

MISSION: Page A5



Michael Vosburg / Forum Photo Editor

Wess Philome speaks for the local Black Lives Matter and OneFargo groups on Monday, June 8, during a press conference in Fargo's Island Park.

Claims against police put Fargo BLM activists in 'fish bowl'

Fargo

They are entering different territory now, these young protesters who've vowed to change the way we do business here in Fargo-Moorhead.

They've gone from optimists who led a peaceful march and a widely lauded celebration, both times working closely with local authorities, into

activists making claims of illegal activity, lying and scapegoating by the Fargo Police Department.

The group offered no evidence to back up their claims.

They'd better be right, because their credibility is at stake.

From here on out, every word and action they take will be scrutinized from every direction.



MIKE MCFEELY
The Forum

Welcome to the fish bowl.

The local chapter of Black Lives Matter and OneFargo organizers held a brief press conference at

the gazebo in downtown's Island Park on Monday, June 8, and leveled serious charges of misconduct at Fargo police.

Spokesman Wess Philome said police engaged "in an illegal black ops mission against community activists and its citizens" during a peaceful march that turned into a riot May 30 when protesters honored

George Floyd, a black man who died when a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes.

He said Fargo Police Chief Dave Todd knew about the undercover activities of then-chief deputy and longtime cop Todd Osmundson, who resigned after being accused of going rogue that day without the

knowledge of anybody in the department.

Philome said his group has reason to believe Todd received "direct intel" through the night from Osmundson and "our belief is that Todd may have gone so far as to call deputy chief Osmundson at midnight to advise him

MCFEELY: Page A5

INSIDE TODAY'S FORUM



LIFE: Local artists venture into new web spaces with TikTok. PAGE B2

Burgum's primary involvement lacks obvious parallel in ND

By Patrick Springer
pspringer@forumcomm.com

FARGO — North Dakota's governor aims to become Boss Burgum, head of an influential political machine. Or he's settling grudges. Or he's out to remold the Republican Party by supporting more moderate candidates. The motivation depends on who's talking — and lots of tongues are wag-



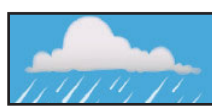
Burgum

ging after disclosures that Republican Gov. Doug Burgum, a tech mogul-turned-politician, has poured \$1.85 million of his own money into Dakota Leadership PAC, which is run by two of his

PARALLEL: Page A3



Today's weather



Windy with periods of rain

66°
54°

Details, B8

Classifieds	B5-7
Comics.....	B3
Crosswords.....	B6
Life.....	B2
Obituaries	A6
Opinion	A7
Sports	B1

"Having everything planned ahead of time gave us the peace of mind we so needed. Thank you for honoring our Dad and fulfilling all his wishes. Simply the BEST!" - TW

Serving...when the need is Greatest

KORSMO
funeral service

409 8th Street South
Moorhead | 218-233-1533
www.korsmofuneralservice.com

MISSION

From Page A1

in Minneapolis police custody on May 25.

Philome said Osmundson was part of a secret “illegal black op mission” against Black Lives Matter.

The group believes Todd was receiving “intel” from Osmundson during the march, which later erupted into a riot in downtown Fargo, a mission that continued throughout the night, ending when Todd told Osmundson he could go home at midnight.

Fargo police spokeswoman Jessica Schindeldecker, who is included in the accusations because organizers say she accessed traffic surveillance cameras to put the protest under surveillance, said there was no truth to the allegations. Police can use traffic cameras for surveillance, and police did not know of Osmundson’s involvement in the protest, she said.

In a statement released Monday afternoon, Mayor Tim Mahoney, the city’s administration, and the city’s human resources departments said jointly that plans are underway to review Professional Standards Office findings regarding the May 30 event.

City leaders, police, Black Lives Matter organizers and a representative from the OneFargo group met on Monday.

“Today’s conversation was divergent from earlier discussions with the OneFargo organizing team,” the city’s statement said. “It was characterized by new demands and positions that were contrary to earlier agreements. Opportunities were offered to collaborate for change, but rejected.”

City leaders say they remain committed to facilitating further dialogue, and stated that additional levels of reviews “during this unprecedented process” will be received, reviewed and acted upon

by Mahoney, the administration and the city’s HR office.

Black Lives Matter members have submitted open records requests to learn more, but Philome asked reporters at the news conference to do their own investigating to find out whether Osmundson’s undercover work was actually sanctioned, despite Todd’s characterization that Osmundson was acting as a rogue cop.

“This is not something that we can do ourselves,” he said, urging reporters to ask their own questions and delve into the matter.

Organizers also officially requested the immediate release and dismissal of all charges against 18 people arrested in relation to the May 30 riot in downtown Fargo, Philome said. He also stated that an independent body should take over any internal investigation into Osmundson’s involvement within the police department.

“The truth will not be set free when the police investigate themselves,” Philome said.

Philome would not answer any questions, including what proof he had for his allegations, but said the group’s efforts to get to the bottom of what happened are continuing.

“It is a sensitive matter,” he said. “We do not want this to be viewed as us against the Fargo Police Department.”

Philome’s statement came after members of Black Lives Matter met earlier Monday with Fargo city officials. Because Todd’s motives and actions are in question, he should not oversee the investigation into Osmundson’s actions, Philome said.

WDAY checked with two city spokesmen who said that, as of Monday afternoon, the city has not received any open records requests from Black Lives Matter seeking information about Osmundson and Todd.

MCFEELY

From Page A1

that he could go home.”

Philome said Fargo police “failed to properly prepare” for the march.

“The actions and inactions of local law enforcement almost led to loss of life and the subsequent riot that followed,” Philome said.

Philome said Osmundson, with the Fargo Police Department for 31 years before his resignation, is being made a “scapegoat” by Todd.

“The problems in the department are much deeper,” he said.

BLM is demanding an independent investigation into Osmundson’s conduct because, the group says, the internal affairs officer assigned to the matter reports directly to Todd.

These are explosive allegations, particularly in a community in which law enforcement is held in high regard by much of the largely white population and worshipped by some local media outlets.

Philome said what’s happened over the past 10 days in Fargo isn’t an event, it’s a movement. For the sake of that movement, BLM leaders better have their accusations correct. If not, there’s a good chance they’ll lose the significant momentum they’ve built.

There’s no reason to believe their claims aren’t accurate, the same way there’s no reason to believe they are accurate. Philome didn’t offer evidence to back up the allegations, nor did he take questions after he spoke for nine minutes citing the “sensitive nature of this matter.”

The question would be, then, why say anything at all at this point? Espe-

cially when Philome said “we are working to verify the information” and referenced open-records requests he said the group was “processing” but had so far yielded no information. As of late Monday afternoon, two city spokesmen said Fargo had not received any requests for documents from BLM seeking information about Osmundson and Todd.

There was a feel of hastiness to Monday’s affair, like BLM was in a rush to make the allegations before it was ready to reveal whatever hard evidence it had.

This is backward of the usual process, which is to gather facts and then present them.

Philome also asked for help from the media in investigating BLM’s claims, which is legitimate. If there is a big story to be found, it’s our job to try to find it. Reporters, editors and columnists at Forum Communications Co. receive tips constantly. It’s often how we break stories.

But this was asking for help after making accusations public. Again, have you landed your catch or is this a fishing expedition?

Philome and BLM members met earlier Monday with Fargo police and city officials, going public with their assertions afterward. That gave things a weird vibe. Philome praised the police and some individual officers and said he wants to continue to work with them, while at the same time accusing them of being corrupt.

“We don’t want this to be us against the Fargo police,” Philome said at one point.

It might be too late for that, whether or not BLM’s claims turn out to be true.

Readers can reach Forum columnist Mike McFeely at (701) 451-5655



Photos by C.S. Hagen / The Forum

Claude Vyomuugu listens while friends speak to former Deputy Chief Todd Osmundson Sunday, June 7, about systemic racism.

BIAS

From Page A1

for comment on this story, but he referred the paper to a news release addressing Black Lives Matter activists’ request for an independent review of Osmundson’s conduct. The mayor and city officials, along with police, will review any findings surrounding the events of May 30, according to the release. Multiple phone messages left for Chief David Todd were not returned.

‘The change in heart’

About 6:30 a.m. the day of the Fargo Marches for George Floyd protest, Osmundson messaged Chief Todd encouraging all law enforcement to march with and show support for the protesters, according to a text message screenshot Osmundson shared with The Forum.

Since Osmundson’s resignation from the police department, he said he’s been trying to learn how bias may have influenced police response to the protest and riot, and he said his learning curve is steep. He met with Black Lives Matter organizers on Sunday afternoon, June 7. Separately, he invited other people involved in the protest to his home to talk, and to answer questions. He’s come out publicly on social media saying he wants to right the wrongs of nearly three decades of policing.

Before May 30, however, Osmundson admits he disliked Colin Kaepernick, the civil rights activist and NFL quarterback, taking a knee during the national anthem. He believed Black Lives Matter was “organized crime.” He thought most Native Americans were drunks that at times deserved an extra twist on the handcuffs, he said.

“We get ingrained in bias and profiling. Even today, if I’m pulling up, and I see a 30-year-old white man in a sedan with four new car tires, I don’t think anything of it. I go one block further and I see a black man in a Cadillac with four new tires, I wonder, ‘Where did he steal those from?’” Osmundson said.

“It is a built-in bias. And I have not treated every Native American properly either,” he said. He said the reason he did not speak out against bias in the Fargo Police Department before his resignation was because of the rank-and-file structure built into law enforcement. We’re “basically trained not to break from rank and file ever,” he said.

Osmundson said he fell prey to bias because, as a police officer, he saw so much of the darker side of life. He said he had a



In the background, then deputy chief Todd Osmundson holds up a sign with protesters May 30 in front of Fargo police headquarters, 105 25th St. N.



Claude Vyomuugu raises a fist at Fargo police headquarters on May 30 during the Fargo Marches for George Floyd protest.

psychological exam 31 years ago when he joined the police force, but not one since. Rookie late-night shifts combined with overexposure to criminals instills an unbalanced perspective in many police officers, he said.

“Our souls that were once loving become hard,” Osmundson said. “We need to balance those interactions, then we can maintain peace officers throughout their careers, then they won’t have deep-seated biases toward people of color.”

“I didn’t understand until this weekend. At the protest, I started seeing Kaepernick jerseys, that’s when my daughters said that kneeling had nothing to do with Derek Chauvin,” Osmundson said, referring to the Minneapolis police officer who knelt on Floyd’s neck for several minutes before he died.

Osmundson’s daughter, Nichole, described the changes she’s seen in her father in a Facebook post.

“I have seen him admit to his past biases. I have seen him willing to voice this new understanding despite backlash. Most of us never have the guts to say ‘I was wrong,’ but I’ve witnessed him do this Every. Single. Day,” she wrote.

“For those of you questioning if it’s genuine, I hope you continue to hold my family accountable. For those of you who don’t understand the change in heart or think this is a betrayal of police, I hope you will continue to listen and learn from others. I hope you will take the time to hear my dad’s heart. Caring for law enforcement and realizing police reform is needed are not polar opposites.”

Protest at the police station

When Osmundson first heard protesters were marching toward Fargo police headquarters at 25th Street and First Avenue North, he thought he knew what they wanted, he said. Images of protesters torching the Minneapolis Police Department’s 3rd Precinct were fresh in his mind from the day before.

“I was concerned with the peaceful march (in Fargo) when it stopped becoming a march and turned into a protest against the police department. Then every officer thought it was ‘burn the police department down,’” Osmundson said.

Prepared for 300 protesters, the thousands who showed up surprised the department, he said. “We didn’t understand. Why are you marching in Fargo? Go march in Minneapolis.”

When the protesters arrived at headquarters, he grabbed a camera to photograph the crowd, but when he focused the lens, he saw faces he knew: his daughter’s friends.

“And I thought, ‘Why are these kids here and angry at the police department?’ My daughter had friends out there. You have to understand, my police training taught me to believe that Black Lives Matter was organized crime,” Osmundson said.

Something broke inside him when he realized he didn’t understand what was happening, he said. He saw a sign he agreed with, “One Race, The Human Race,” and jumped onto a concrete platform to hold it high.

“My daughters taught me that black lives

matter, your life matters, but we have a privileged life. Black lives matter because they’re the ones who have had all the injustice. I can now say black lives matter and not hesitate. I get it. But before, nobody told me that and that’s why I’m willing to lose my job,” he said.

“But I wish I had grabbed a Black Lives Matter sign. I do.”

‘They would have gone home’

Sitting around Osmundson’s dining room table on Sunday, his friend Claude Vyomuugu and others — all young, all black and all Fargoans — listened carefully before asking questions.

Vyomuugu explained why the May 30 riot never should have happened.

Take a long history of racial profiling, add a skirmish line with police in riot gear, holding truncheons and shooting tear gas, and the law enforcement presence alone was provocation, Vyomuugu said.

“I told officers that day, stay calm, and people will go home. Officers were the ones putting anger into people,” Vyomuugu said.

“I went out there to protect lives and property,” Osmundson said of his decision to go undercover. He changed out of his uniform into civilian clothes before 1 p.m. “I wanted to learn more. I went out there as a (public information officer) to make sure people didn’t get run over.”

Osmundson said he alerted incident commanders that he was marching undercover with protesters as early as 2:22 p.m. “As a deputy chief, I’m free to make decisions, and have been for 15 years,” he said. Osmundson believes the riot could have been prevented. “If we had been down there personally engaging (protesters), they would have gone home,” he said.

“Eighteen people arrested,” Osmundson said. “I’d like to ask them, have you ever harmed a police officer or thrown a rock like that before? I don’t think all of those people had launched a rock at an officer before.”

“The problem is police are pretty much feeling we are supposed to be the community, but we end up being cops and we tell you what to do because we know what’s best. But I’m committed to fix that,” Osmundson said.

“I was them for 31 years, and I back them and they’re wonderful, but they’re ignorant, and now they need to be educated.”

Readers can reach Forum reporter C.S. Hagen at 701 241-5535.