

## Krokoff's moment

By MARTIN ALAN GREENBERG

Sunday, August 1, 2010

Albany has a new peacemaker in chief. The city and surrounding communities have a great opportunity to take progressive steps to promote public safety.

Steven Krokoff, who was sworn in as chief on Thursday after being nominated by Mayor [Jerry Jennings](#) and confirmed by the [Common Council](#), leads the region's largest municipal police force.

The appointment of Krokoff, formerly the deputy chief, gives Albany and its surrounding communities a great opportunity to take progressive steps to promote public safety.

Among his challenges, Krokoff must formulate a plan to address social disorganization in Albany. This is measured as a neighborhood's capacity to regulate itself through formal and informal processes of social control.

He also must deal with the problem of too few minority police officers.

Both issues could be addressed by the establishment of well-organized auxiliary police programs. Auxiliary police units could help to instill and preserve order and to promote feelings of security in neighborhoods. Auxiliaries and police can work together to deal with disorderly behavior, including public drinking, gangs, street harassment and prostitution. They also can address physical blight, including vandalism, abandoned property and garbage-filled alleys and streets.

Krokoff can tackle the problem of too few minority police officers by organizing a farm club, just as in the major leagues, and at the same time mobilize community policing's most important partner -- the public.

New York City has used this model for more than 50 years. There, the auxiliaries are the police department's "eyes and ears."

They patrol neighborhoods on foot and in patrol cars. Based upon police reported crime statistics, auxiliaries are deployed by the precinct commander to the locations that require a uniformed presence for crime prevention. Equipped with police department radios, auxiliaries are often right there when something happens or if someone needs help and are able to call for assistance on the spot.

For younger members, the auxiliaries give them the additional opportunity of learning whether they might like a career in law enforcement.

Krokoff also can serve as a catalyst and facilitator to bring together key partners in the criminal justice system to form a coalition to contend with our region's crime problems. The best way to do this is to enable representatives from the major professional criminal justice and public interest organizations, both public and private, to meet.

Amazing things can happen when a team is assembled to work on a problem. Imagine what might be accomplished if our local police chiefs, county district attorneys, sheriffs and probation directors and court officials could routinely meet with representatives from such groups as the area's business community and media outlets, the [Capital District Regional Planning Commission](#), Capital Region chapter of the [New York Civil Liberties Union](#), [Correctional Association of New York](#), [Vera Institute of Justice](#), ecumenical organizations, criminal justice college leaders, New York State Auxiliary Police Association and other concerned groups or organizations.

Consider what groups like the Correctional Association of New York, for example, might contribute. The association was founded in 1844 by concerned citizens and was granted unique authority by the state Legislature to inspect prisons and to report its findings and recommendations to the legislature and the public. It is one of only two independent organizations in the United States with such legislative authority.

Through monitoring, research, public education, leadership development and policy advocacy, the association strives to make the administration of justice in New York more efficient and humane.

It envisions a criminal justice system that holds a person accountable for a crime yet does not condemn an entire life based on a person's worst act, a system that recognizes the power of individuals to transform their lives and that encourages such change, and a system that expresses the value of social and racial equality on all levels.

When addressing the Common Council, Krokoff said, "Part of the strategy that I have, that I would look to employ, along with my leadership team, is how to better engage the community. Collaborate, work together, analyze what the problems are, get to the root of the issues that are causing fear and then come up with action plans and solutions to these issues."

Two good ways to start bringing the police and the public together to contend with social disorganization are an auxiliary force and a coalition of public interest organizations and justice officials.

*Martin Alan Greenberg is an assistant professor of criminal justice at the [College of Saint Rose](#) and the director of education and research for the [New York State Association of Auxiliary Police](#). He is a former volunteer New York City Auxiliary Police deputy inspector. He holds a law degree from New York Law School and a Ph.D. from [John Jay College of Criminal Justice](#). His e-mail address is [greenbem@strose.edu](mailto:greenbem@strose.edu).*