Lafayette Must Be Known As Tough Town On Crime

Criminals Beware
Alert, well-trained policemen, deputies and troopers working together will catch you. An aggressive District Attorney will prosecute you. A tough judge will sentence you. Dope dealers pay particular heed!

That, in effect, is the sign we would like to see posted at the Lafayette Parish line. Lafayette needs to be known as a tough town on crime, a town where the only way crime pays is with a term behind bars.

To gain that reputation, Lafayette needs efficient, professional police work, it needs vigorous prosecution of the guilty, and it needs a tough standard of justice administered from the court bench.

Much progress has been made toward those ends. Law enforcement agencies here continue to show increased professionalism, better service. The District Attorney's office is compiling a good record of convictions. Progress has been made in improving our judicial system.

But now is not the time for Lafayette to rest on its laurels.

We've said it before, but it worth emphasizing: As Lafayette continues its growth from a sleepy bayou town to a major metropolitan area in the South, that progress will bring some bad with the good.

One of the "big city" evils that we can anticipate and must guard against is increased crime.

To do that, we must continue to upgrade all law enforcement agencies, coordinate and consolidate them whenever possible, and ensure that the criminal element that looks at Lafayette as lucrative hunting grounds becomes aware of one thing: That this is a city where the criminal is caught, brought to a fair and speedy trial, and where justice is administered with a firm hand.

Nowhere is this more particularly true than in the area of narcotics law violations. Lafayette is the home of a growing university, it is a "young town" in terms of population. It is a ready market for the drug dealer.

Lafayette must become known as a town for drug dealers to be shy of, a town where the word is out that it is tough on dope, that the dealer and hard drug user will be caught and prosecuted and jailed.

Law enforcement agencies at all levels must recognize, too, that the factors that will affect police service here are the same that affect all levels of government service. Lafayette is a rapidly growing city, in terms of population and in terms of area. Police service, like all government service, will have to hurry to keep pace with that growth.

City, parish and state lawmakers must continue to be able to face not only the problems of the present, but must be able to project their needs, to anticipate and meet the increased level of police service that will be needed as we grow.

Police officers and government leaders must recognize that Lafayette's growth will continue demands for more manpower, more facilities, more equipment, increased sophistication in the lawman's tools and techniques.

We have suggested in the past, and continue to believe, that the ultimate answer will be in the formation of a metropolitan police force and that ever-increasing coordination and consolidation among the various police agencies here-city, parish, state police, USL campus security-is the only way in which Lafayette can meet the demands on manpower and facilities and equipment that the future will bring.

Lafayette's policemen and her citizenry must continue to work together to keep crime and the criminal element here under control, to maintain our police forces at the most effective levels.

No matter how effective our lawmen, however, crime will not be controlled here if the guilty are not fully prosecuted or if our courts allow guilty persons to go unpunished.

Policemen can make a thousand arrests, but if those arrested are allowed to return to the streets for continued criminal acts through ineffective prosecution or through undue leniency from the courts, the criminal element will stay with us.

We ask our law enforcement officers to continue the upgrading of their departments that has been so pronounced in recent years, we urge continued and closer coordination and consolidation among police agencies-with an eye toward their eventual merger. We ask the District Attorney for tough and vigorous prosecution of criminals. And we ask our courts for sentences commensurate with their crimes, so that improved police work does not go for naught.

The Advertiser pledges its full support towards those ends.

(Tomorrow: Transportation)