

Chief DiLuzio: “That’s the way protests should be”

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police June 1, 2020

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*photo Amy Shortell, Morning Call
click on this photo in the article linked below for several dozen
Bethlehem photos*

from Jennifer Sheehan, “People felt like they were heard’: Why Lehigh Valley’s demonstrations remained peaceful.” Morning Call, May 31, 2020.

Despite more than 700 people taking to the streets of Allentown and Bethlehem on Saturday to protest the death of George Floyd, no one was arrested and no significant property damage was reported, police said.

Protests in the Lehigh Valley were different because they stayed focused on the death of George Floyd, Bethlehem police Chief Mark DiLuzio said.

Floyd, who was black, died after being pinned for more than eight minutes with a white officer's knee on his neck in Minnesota.

"The difference was I think the people here were trying to get to the issue at hand," DiLuzio said. "In smaller cities, you have people who are truly interested in the death of George Floyd. In the bigger cities, you have that interest but you also have other people who come into the situation and look for free stuff through looting."

DiLuzio estimated about 500 protesters marched through Bethlehem on Saturday afternoon although protesters had higher estimates.

"They got their message out there and that's their constitutional right," DiLuzio said. "We wanted to make sure they were able to do that."

DiLuzio was on hand during the protest and said it was very orderly.

"That's the way protests should be," he said.

One of the local groups that organized Saturday's rally in Bethlehem was Lehigh Valley Stands Up, a nonprofit pushing for progressive change. Ashleigh Strange, who heads the group, said Sunday that they worked hard to make sure voices were heard and that the event was peaceful.

Another factor that helped, Strange said, was that Bethlehem police were not in riot gear.

"On their part, they did not escalate," Strange said. "And we did not escalate because that was not the point."

She also said they had people who put themselves between police and protesters who were shouting at officers.

"The march was there so people could be heard," Strange said. "This was the place where they needed to express their anger. People were not there to destroy property. They were there to be heard. And because they felt like they were heard they didn't need to destroy property."

DiLuzio said he was horrified after learning of how Floyd died.

“No time in the 40 years I’ve been a police officer have I ever been trained to, or heard of kneeling on someone’s throat as proper police procedure,” DiLuzio said. “The first thing I said when I saw the video was, ‘This is horrible and this is wrong.’ I don’t know any cops who have said that that cop was justified. This is something that the police and protesters can agree on. That picture is a bad image for American law enforcement.”