

## VOLUNTEERS AND POLICE OFFICERS TEAM UP TO PREVENT CRIME

Crime prevention is an important part of law enforcement. Many law enforcement agencies recognize the importance of volunteers to assist them in achieving their crime prevention mission. This issue of *VIPS in Focus* features three agencies who work with their volunteers to promote crime prevention efforts throughout their community.

### *Town of Herndon, Virginia, Police Department*

Herndon is the largest town in Fairfax County, a major suburb of Washington, D.C., with a population of 23,500. The town is part of the Dulles Technology Corridor and is home to the headquarters of such companies as Airbus North America and Cox Communications. The Herndon Police Department (HPD) has 58 sworn officers and 17 civilian employees. The Herndon Police Department is accredited at the federal and state level. The town of Herndon has also been designated as a certified crime prevention community by the Commonwealth of Virginia. The mission of the department is to provide law enforcement and related services, in partnership with the law-abiding public, to enrich the quality of life and promote a sense of community.

#### *Volunteer Efforts*

The HPD is supported by the Herndon Police Citizen's Support Team (HPCST), a volunteer group working in concert with the department. The HPCST has 14 volunteers who in 2007

donated 2,271.25 volunteer hours. The HPCST is governed by a set of bylaws. The organization's board includes a president, a vice president, a secretary-treasurer, a director of training, and a director of logistics. The board acts as supervisors and coordinators of all routine assistance and emergency support provided by the HPCST to the department.

HPCST volunteers are used in many ways to support the mission of the HPD. Volunteers provide free routine fingerprinting for all businesses and personnel in and around Herndon and the neighboring town of Reston. The HPCST supports the department by using trained and authorized members to assist with traffic control during town functions, traffic collisions, and emergency situations. The volunteers also assist the department by providing language translation in Spanish.

Volunteers who enforce handicapped parking violations use a department parking enforcement vehicle for these patrols. Volunteers set their own hours for regular patrol except for special events such as Fourth of July festivities where they work in prearranged shifts. Each member is provided a police radio and patrols the town in their private vehicles and on bicycles reporting incidents such as vandalism, burglaries, and suspected drivers under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Volunteers are required to keep the radio with them during their patrol as department policy requires them to report all criminal activity that they become aware of while patrolling. Many times, volunteers have

reported incidents that have occurred during their personal time.

### *Recruitment, Screening, and Training*

Volunteers for HPCST are recruited in a variety of ways. Information about the HPCST is provided at community events and during Herndon's Citizens Police Academy.

Volunteers and officers who come in contact with citizens who are looking to perform police-related volunteer work refer them to the HPCST.

Membership is open to any Virginia resident who agrees to comply with the regulations, policies, and guidelines of the team and the department. All prospective volunteers must complete an application and have their fingerprints taken. Following an extensive background check on each applicant, favorable candidates interview with the HPCST board. Recommendations are given to the chief of police, who conducts a final interview with the prospective volunteers. If the chief recommends the candidates, they are then invited to attend an HPCST meeting where team members vote to approve or deny their membership. If approved, volunteers must satisfactorily complete recruit training and the required probationary period of one year. After the probationary period, volunteers must be voted on by HPCST to earn full membership. The HPCST bylaws allow for a maximum of 20 volunteers at any time.

HPCST volunteers are trained to help with traffic control, patrol, emergency management, surveillance, crowd control, and crime scene perimeter control. Volunteers are also trained in National Incident Management System (NIMS) guidelines and proper radio procedures. Some HPCST volunteers are also trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Volunteers who wish to work in bicycle patrol

or handicapped parking enforcement receive additional training. Most HPCST training is conducted by the police department.

### *Program Activities*

In addition to the volunteer work for the department, some members of HPCST sit on the board of the Herndon Crime Prevention Council (HCPC), which educates citizens on crime prevention and their responsibilities to reduce crime. The HCPC provides specialized crime prevention training, promotes the formation of neighborhood, business, and fleet watches, and serves as a liaison between the police department and citizens. The council also provides safety training, educates the community about gang activity, and works with the community regarding neighborhood safety.



### *Contributions*

Through the work of HCPC and HPCST volunteers, the town has 14 Neighborhood Watch programs and two business watch programs. The McGruff House®<sup>1</sup> program has been established as a way for neighbors to promote the well-being of children and to be of help in emergencies. The Herndon Police Department, with support of the HPCST and the HCPC, coordinates activities surrounding National Night Out, an event designed to generate participation in local crime prevention efforts and strengthen neighborhood spirit and police-community partnerships. HCPC also provides information through meetings and brochures to the community on crime prevention topics such as personal and home

<sup>1</sup>McGruff House ® Program is a registered mark of the National Crime Prevention Council. A McGruff House is a temporary haven for children who find themselves in frightening or dangerous situations. Children are told that they can go to a specially marked McGruff House, which might be a house, a townhouse, an apartment, or a mobile home, any time they sense danger as they go to and from school or are playing in the neighborhood.

security, child safety, business security, and cybercrime.

In the 30 years that the HPCST has been in existence, several members of the team have received awards from the town of Herndon, the Herndon Police Department, and the Northern Virginia Crime Prevention Association. The group has been featured in numerous articles.

### ***Lakewood, Colorado, Police Department***

With a population of approximately 144,000, Lakewood is the fourth most populous city in Colorado and, according to a 2005 U.S. Census Bureau estimate, the 164<sup>th</sup> most populous city in the United States. The Lakewood Police Department (LPD) has 311 sworn officers and 146 civilian employees.

#### *Volunteer Efforts*

From 1984 until 1994, volunteers with the Lakewood Police Department did clerical work exclusively. The responsibilities of the volunteers have expanded to include geographic information system (GIS) mapping, translation, surveillance and extra patrol, handicap parking enforcement, Neighborhood Watch, crime victim follow-up, victim assistance, community talks, neighborhood radar speed patrol, assistance to stranded motorists, fingerprinting, information dissemination at events, pedestrian traffic control at large events, tours, follow-up on runaways, assistance to school resource officers, Project Lifesaver<sup>2</sup> program administration, and assistance with holiday programs for senior citizens and underprivileged children. About half of the department's volunteers activities include crime prevention efforts. Its 116 volunteers contributed more than 14,800 hours in 2007.

#### *Recruitment, Screening, and Training*

Potential volunteers are recruited from a variety of different sources, such as the city Web site, the Volunteer Match Program, and advertisements on the local cable TV channel. For volunteer positions other than office work, anyone who would like to volunteer must attend the police department's 10-week citizen police academy. The graduating class of the citizen police academy is encouraged to volunteer with the department and many graduates do.

All prospective volunteers are required to pass a Colorado Crime Information Center background check, which complies with the NCIC background check. Additionally, they must provide references and undergo a polygraph examination.

In addition to completing the citizen police academy, all volunteers who work outside the office must become proficient in the use of a police radio and know the department's basic rules, regulations, and safety procedures before they receive their first volunteer assignment. Volunteers who drive a city-owned vehicle must also pass a defensive driving course. Some volunteers get specialized training related to their assignments. For example, the neighborhood speeds watch volunteers receive radar training.

#### *Program Activities*

The Neighborhood Watch participants act as extra eyes and ears to prevent crime throughout the city. They receive training on how to recognize criminal activities and how to work with the police to eliminate criminal activities in their neighborhoods. Neighborhood Watch volunteers maintain current records and ensure that neighborhood programs remain active. On a weekly, monthly, and yearly basis, two

<sup>2</sup>By forming partnerships with local law enforcement and public safety organizations, Project Lifesaver deploys specially trained teams with the most reliable technology available to quickly locate and return wandering adults and children to their families and caregivers. Clients that are enrolled in the Project Lifesaver program wear a personalized wristband that emits a tracking signal. When caregivers notify the local Project Lifesaver agency that the person is missing, a search and rescue team responds to the wanderer's area and starts searching with the mobile locator tracking system.

volunteers provide GIS-formatted crime statistics on burglaries, auto thefts, and criminal trespass in the city. The volunteers mount and frame large maps of the plotted crime statistics for detectives and other officers to use for community presentations. These maps can quickly show where active Neighborhood Watch groups exist and what crimes are occurring in their neighborhood. Over time, GIS-formatted statistics can show the success of a Neighborhood Watch program reducing crime. Additionally, this information is posted on the city's Web page for all residents to view and can help residents develop strategies to avoid becoming a victim.



Volunteers provide a service to the department and community during all hours of the day. One group of volunteers patrols multi-family housing parking lots in the early mornings looking for unattended, running vehicles. This happens regularly on cold mornings. Volunteers hand out brochures to residents and leave brochures on cars that discuss the risk of car theft with unattended cars.

#### *Contributions*

Volunteers help the Lakewood Police Department provide better and timelier service to the city. The GIS-mapping statistics provided by volunteers have strengthened Neighborhood Watch groups' efforts to prevent crime. Overall, the volunteers have helped to bring a citizen's perspective to the sworn personnel.

## ***Billings, Montana, Police Department***

Billings, Montana, is the largest city in a 500-mile radius comprising south-central and eastern Montana and northern Wyoming. The city serves as a shopping and accommodation center for area residents and highway travelers. The Billings Police Department (BPD) serves a population of more than 100,000 spread out over 40 square miles with a staff of 133 sworn officers and 25 civilian employees.

#### *Volunteer Efforts*

The BPD has 86 active volunteers, including 24 BPD volunteers that work in the crime prevention division. Volunteers in the report writing center take police reports on cold thefts, vandalism, traffic violations, identity theft, and lost and found property. Adults with outstanding warrants for traffic violations or misdemeanors are contacted by volunteers. Volunteers in the report writing center also telephone victims to follow up on their burglary, theft, or vandalism case and answer questions they may have for the BPD. The special projects division volunteers serve multiple functions, including high-level computer programming. The volunteer patrol unit division is responsible for the abandoned vehicle program and the speed trailer program. The unit deals with an average of 225 abandoned vehicle reports per month overall. Volunteers contributed more than 12,900 hours in 2007. The ages of BPD volunteers range from 15 to 81; the average age is 49.

#### *Recruitment, Screening, and Training*

Volunteers are recruited through a variety of methods. The most valuable way for BPD to recruit volunteers is through the citizen police academy, which is held twice a year and averages 20 people per class. The department advertises in the local newspaper, produces a recruitment brochure, and promotes the volunteer program during the Crime Prevention Division's special events. Word of

mouth recruiting has also been successful.

All prospective volunteers must fill out an application, undergo a criminal record check, which complies with the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), undergo state and local criminal records checks, and provide three references. If the volunteer coordinator is satisfied with the results of a prospective volunteer's initial screening, the individual will be brought in for an interview. Volunteers who are accepted into the volunteer program must sign a contract outlining what they can expect from the BPD and what the BPD expects from them. They are then assigned to a division of the volunteer program according to the department's needs and their interests, skills, and availability.

The amount and type of training for new volunteers depends on the activity to which they are assigned. Some divisions use a group training program while others use a mentorship style of training.



### *Program Activities*

The goal of the Crime Prevention Division is to reduce and prevent incidents of crime in all Billings neighborhoods. Programs include Neighborhood Watch, McGruff House, bicycle registration, Operation Identification, child identification DNA kit, and identity theft prevention. The crime prevention leadership team, consisting of volunteers and employees, serves as an advisory committee for the Crime Prevention Division. The team involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the crime prevention volunteers and activities.

Team members discuss procedures and program goals and help with day-to-day decision making. The success of the crime prevention division is attributed to this team.

A BPD volunteer came up with the idea to have child care centers become a part of the McGruff House program. Twenty-four day care centers now participate. The crime prevention program also publishes a biannual newsletter that informs the 1,700 families participating in Neighborhood Watch and the 65 houses participating in the McGruff House program about current crime prevention activities and hot topics in the community. A biannual meeting is held for the Neighborhood Watch captains and McGruff House participants.

The volunteer program is located in a new Crime Prevention Center that is staffed by three paid employees, one of whom is a crime prevention officer who spends approximately 25% of her time working with the volunteer program. BPD recently renovated the 3,000-square-foot space that was donated by a local mall for the Center. The total cost for renovations was approximately \$150,000; the city of Billings provided \$18,500 and the remaining funds were donated by the community, primarily the construction community. The new space is an operations center for the volunteer program including the Crime Prevention Division. It includes office space for volunteers, a crime prevention store, a training area for crime prevention classes, and meeting space for Neighborhood Watch groups, other community groups, other volunteer program divisions, and the BPD chaplains.

### *Contributions*

The Crime Prevention Center and the work of the volunteers has dramatically increased the number of McGruff Houses in the Billings area by centralizing all the crime prevention resources in a location easily accessible to the community. According to the National Crime

Prevention Council, McGruff Houses have significantly reduced children's victimization and shown the value a community places on protecting its youngest citizens. BPD's volunteer program, which reaches beyond the strength of the Neighborhood Watch and McGruff House programs, exists because of the leadership team, a strong, capable volunteer who coordinates the crime prevention program and 24 dedicated volunteers who do the work.

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### VIPS Products and Resources

#### VIPS Resource Library

Browse and download sample documents from law enforcement volunteer programs, such as application forms, program policies, and volunteer handbooks.

**Educational Video Series: *Introducing Law Enforcement Volunteerism to the Community*** describes the breadth and scope of volunteer efforts in law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. It can be used as a recruitment video at Neighborhood Watch or community group meetings and events. This video features the volunteers of the Billings Police Department crime prevention leadership team.

#### Volunteering with Law Enforcement: A Citizen's Guide

This informational brochure is geared towards community members and provides basic information about the law enforcement volunteerism. Agencies can use this tool to recruit volunteers.

All resources and products can be found at [www.policevolunteers.org](http://www.policevolunteers.org).

The Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) Program works to enhance the capacity of state and local law enforcement to utilize volunteers. VIPS serves as a gateway to resources and information for and about law enforcement volunteer programs. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) manages the VIPS Program in partnership with and on behalf of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.



This project was supported by Award No. 2005-DK-BX-K025 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not represent the official position or policies of the United States Department of Justice.