

## Volunteers Assisting Rural Law Enforcement Agencies

Day-to-day operations in municipal law enforcement agencies are dictated by the population they serve. It is generally understood that the larger the community, the larger the law enforcement agency. And while many departments grapple with delivering all of the programs and services their community asks for, departments serving small or rural jurisdictions are forced to be creative in order to expand their reach. This issue of VIPS in Focus examines law enforcement agencies meeting the specific requirements of the U. S. Census Bureau's definition of rural: open country and settlements with fewer than 2,500 residents. Areas designated as rural can have population densities as high as 999 per square mile or as low as 1 person per square mile.

### *Brookings County, South Dakota, Sheriff's Office*

The Brookings County Sheriff's Office (BCSO) serves a predominantly rural farming community in southeastern South Dakota in a jurisdiction of 800 square miles and 20,000 people with eight

patrol deputies. The sheriff's office also maintains the county jail. BCSO has jurisdiction over all the unincorporated area in the county and contracts with four cities in the county. The Retired Senior Volunteer Program<sup>1</sup> in Brookings serves the sheriff's office with 17 volunteers. The volunteer program has been in existence since 2005 and still has 14 of its original members.

Citizens interested in volunteering complete an application with the local RSVP program which the Sheriff reviews. The Sheriff interviews each potential volunteer and provides a copy of his notes to the RSVP coordinator for his/her file. Volunteers receive 40 hours of in-service training and 12 hours patrol training, prior to being put on the patrol schedule. The introductory training includes an orientation to the department,



Brookings County Sheriff's Office volunteers with their patrol vehicle.

1. Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) engages older Americans as resources within their communities assisting with the delivery of resources and furthering the improvement of neighborhoods and communities. RSVP is a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service, however RSVP programs at the local level are managed by community volunteer centers, offices of aging, and other community organizing non-profit groups. To learn more about how law enforcement agencies partner with RSVP, visit <http://www.policevolunteers.org/pdf/RSVP.pdf>

expectations, safety on the job, report writing, first aid, radio operations, and orientation to county roads. Topical training covers how to handle minor vandalism, motor vehicle accidents, traffic control, abandoned vehicles, and patrolling school zones.

Once volunteers complete training, volunteer pairs patrol in a marked SUV. The vehicle is equipped with green sheriff's office vests that volunteers wear if they exit the vehicle. A first aid kit and a shovel are also in the SUV. The volunteers carry portable radios and patrol in three-hour shifts. Volunteer patrols stick to county roads, as volunteers are not allowed on the interstate.

Major patrol activities consist of conducting homeland security checks on grain elevators and electrical substations, and delivering commodities to county residents. The volunteers' patrol vehicle, a retired deputy patrol vehicle, has a radar gun installed and although they do not have enforcement powers, a simple nod to a speeding motorist from a volunteer sometimes does the trick. Volunteers may also report if they notice frequent high speeds on a particular street. In the morning and afternoon, volunteers are on hand at one of the three schools in the contracted cities to help with traffic direction.

Volunteers encounter many things while on patrol and are trained to handle a variety of situations, some more particular to rural communities such as escaped livestock. Given their familiarity of the county and its residents, the volunteers have become proficient at determining the proper owner and contacting them to retrieve their animals.

The Sheriff recognizes the need for the extra

eyes and ears that volunteers can provide. With only one of the eight sheriff's deputies on duty at any given time, the support that volunteers provide has become invaluable to the department. The county is located on the eastern side of South Dakota which is mostly prairie and during winter storms wind gusts can reach 100 miles per hour and snow drifts can make the interstate impassable. Volunteers assist during some of these extreme weather events, and better equip BCSO to help the county.

### *Collin County, Texas, Sheriff's Office*

Collin County is part of the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex and includes the incorporated cities of Allen, Frisco, McKinney, Plano, Richardson, and Wylie, all of which maintain law enforcement volunteer programs. While the incorporated cities are densely populated, the sheriff is mandated to patrol the unincorporated sections of the county which are quite rural and have a population density of approximately 580 people per square mile. The sheriff's office has 480 employees in administration, operations, and detention. The department also maintains a roster of nearly 150 civilian volunteers who logged more than 5,500 hours in 2009 and are on pace to surpass that in 2010.

The sheriff's office identified several issues warranting the formation of the current volunteer program. The sheriff's office has experienced decreasing resources, which forced the Sheriff to look at new ways to maintain existing services with decreased personnel support. Simultaneously, the graduates of the citizen academy began expressing a desire to volunteer



Collin County Sheriff's Office Citizens on Patrol vehicle that was donated by the Town of Lucas.

their assistance with the operations of the sheriff's office. The sheriff's office was also looking to provide a sense of empowerment to citizens to prevent crime in their communities and find a means to expand sheriff's office services to the community. By establishing a civilian volunteer program, the Collin County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) was able to address each of these needs.

The department has held 17 citizen academy sessions to date. Many of the 216 citizen academy graduates become involved with CCSO volunteer programs as they learn first hand from their fellow citizen academy alumni association the benefits of becoming a CCSO volunteer. In addition to the 14-week citizen academy, volunteers receive an additional 16 hours of in-classroom training and 24 hours of field training required to patrol. If volunteers from other communities can demonstrate proficiency in field operations, their training can be shortened. Prior to becoming a volunteer with the Collin County Sheriff's office, individuals must submit a completed application form which includes a criminal background information form. Individuals' driving records are also checked as a part of the application process.

Volunteers are managed in two groups: alumni association volunteers and citizen on patrol volunteers. All alumni graduates can volunteer in the county. Alumni association volunteers attend community functions to pass out safety education materials and assist with parking control at county events. They also present crime prevention programs in local schools, lend a hand with National Night Out, and help the department's crime prevention officers with projects and programs as needed. Alumni association volunteers also provide support with clerical duties within the department.

The Citizen on Patrol program began in 2009 with 40 volunteers from the larger alumni association volunteer program. The volunteer program has two vehicles to assist in their field operations. The county commissioner's court donated the first marked vehicle. The mayor of a community that contracts law enforcement services from CCSO donated a marked deputy patrol vehicle that was to be retired and volunteers use that vehicle to patrol in that community.

Citizen on Patrol members receive the additional 24 hour field training. Citizen on Patrol volunteers conduct neighborhood watch patrols, assisting at accident scenes and with stranded motorists. Volunteers are trained to remove hazards blocking the roadway, including loose livestock or wild animals. Volunteers assist with sex offender registration and crowd control at large county events. They also aid deputies responding to calls for illegal fireworks on the Fourth of July or other calls year round that do not require a sworn deputy in attendance. Citizen on Patrol volunteers can also assist if a resident is reported as missing.



Collin County Sheriff's Office volunteers help out on a rural accident scene.

A small handful of volunteers who are quite tech savvy put all manuals and training materials on CD-Rom for volunteers and work on database management and other computer needs. Other volunteers use the burglary reports to condense information for citizen patrol members to use while on patrol. During patrols, volunteers talk to owners of businesses that were burglarized and sometimes can provide additional information to the deputy who took the report. Citizens on Patrol act as eyes and ears but are in radio communication with department dispatch if they see something that requires a deputy's attention.

Alumni association volunteers and citizen patrol volunteers now assist the sheriff's office in solving the exact issues that spurred the creation of the volunteer program like maintaining services and expanding programs during a time of mandatory budget cuts.

## *Garden City, Missouri, Police Department*

Garden City, Missouri, is on the south end of the Kansas City Metropolitan area. The city has a population of 2,000 in approximately three square miles, which is a population density of approximately 666 residents per square mile. Due to its proximity to a major city and easy access to an interstate, Garden City uses four officers to handle many of same issues of their larger, more urban neighboring agencies. One unique challenge to this small department is that the next closest municipal law enforcement agency is 35 miles away. In addition to four full time officers (chief of police, sergeant, and two officers), the department has six civilian volunteers, and five reserve officers.

Interested volunteers submit a completed application, use of criminal justice information form, and liability release form to the chief of police for review. Volunteers receive a manual which includes policies and procedures at the start of their tenure. The department has a volunteer serving in the role of volunteer coordinator who works directly with the chief of police to ensure the success of the program. This volunteer is also the department chaplain and a state certified reserve officer. Volunteers in Garden City assist in programs and services that a small department would not have the manpower to do including school safety programs, child safety kit programs, residential code enforcement, vacation house watch, bicycle registration, and special event staffing. Volunteers also assist with building maintenance, municipal court proceedings, animal control, traffic control, vehicle maintenance, information technology support, and administrative support.

The Police Chief is well aware of the benefits and challenges of having a small community on the edge of a large metropolitan area. When the interstate was rerouted, neighboring communities disappeared as the interstate no longer served that community. As the Kansas City metro area grows, residents look to keep their housing costs down and look for larger properties farther from the city but within reasonable commuting distances to Kansas City. To keep Garden City attractive and encourage further development, the chief relies on two volunteers to assist with enforcing residential code. These volunteers can write notices for abandoned cars, excessive trash, overgrown weeds, and other things that the city deems as damaged or in disrepair. The department has provided volunteers a vehicle to drive to conduct their code enforcement patrols.

It was important for the department and the Chief to have a building where residents could come to make a report or talk to an officer. Officers, reserves, and volunteers spent many hours turning a two-bay garage into a functioning police department with office space and meeting space, a reception and records area, and a booking room. By including volunteers in the renovation of the department, volunteers feel they are truly members of the department. The chief also includes volunteer names and responsibilities in the department roster, which list the names of all personnel and his/her responsibilities.



Garden City Police Department volunteers are recognized for their work.

*For More Information:*

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## VIPS Products and Resources

### VIPS Resource Library

Browse and download sample documents from law enforcement volunteer programs, such as program descriptions, position descriptions, and policy and procedures for volunteer programs.

### *VIPS in a School Setting*

This resource describes school-based-law enforcement volunteer efforts such as Citizen Patrols in and around schools, safe school bus stops and intersections, walking school buses or bicycle trains, volunteer school resource officers, school-based citizen police academies, Scholastic Crime Stoppers, and Student Emergency Response Teams (SERT).

### *VIPS in Focus Series*

This publication series addresses specific elements and issues related to law enforcement volunteer programs. The series builds upon information contained in the VIPS resource guide. The *VIPS in Focus* issue *Bridging the Size Gap: Volunteers as a Force Multiplier* highlights the use of volunteers in smaller police departments.

All products and resources 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.



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