

**THE POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM**

**HERMAN GOLDSTEIN**

**EXCELLENCE IN PROBLEM-SOLVING AWARD**

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The Phoenix Police Department has fully embraced the philosophy of Community-Based Policing. One of the basic components of this philosophy is effective problem solving. The ultimate success or failure of Community-Based Policing relies on the qualitative outcomes, or problems solved, rather than the quantitative results such as arrests made, citations issued, etc. This requires that each departmental employee focus on the concerns of their customers. Phoenix Police officer Jeffery Pfaffenbach is one employee deserving of recognition stemming from his incorporation of the Community-Based Policing philosophy into his daily work routine.

Officer Pfaffenbach has been a patrol officer with the Phoenix Police Department for eight years and is currently assigned to the Cactus Park Precinct; one of the department's six precincts. On the evening of January 12, 1994, he and another officer responded to a radio call of suspicious activity in a vacant building within his patrol area. This particular site had become a repeated source of calls for service activity for officers. Upon arrival, numerous suspicious individuals emerged from the property and began to flee. With assistance from other units, including the Air Support and Canine details, four adult males were taken into custody. Charges ranged from burglary and trespass to weapons and drug violations.

Inspection of the vacant property indicated it had become a haven for gang members and transient individuals. A closer examination of the scene also revealed evidence supporting the occurrence of illegal drug activities.

The following day, officer Pfaffenbach located the 81 year old, recently widowed property owner. She related that she had done everything she could to secure the vacant structure and in the process had exhausted her limited financial resources. She expressed concern for the activities that were occurring in and around her property, and indicated that she would assist in any way within her means to deter future problems.

Officer Pfaffenbach maintained close observation of the vacant building in the following days. It became obvious that individuals were continuing to disregard attempts to keep the structure vacant. On several occasions, officer Pfaffenbach volunteered his time and personal resources while off duty to re-secure the structure.

Continued observation revealed that new vagrants had begun to refurbish the structure from the inside, and were in the process of tapping into the main electrical service line to provide power to the vacant building. The type of fortifying procedures employed led officers to believe that the establishment of a Drug Lab was in progress. It was also apparent that the structure was going to facilitate drug sales transactions as well.

Officer Pfaffenbach and neighbors within the area shared the same concerns. The vacant property was adjacent to an apartment complex which housed numerous children and elderly individuals. It was also in close proximity to a grade school and church. It was apparent that the conventional methods utilized to deter the illicit activity in and around the

property were not adequate. Officers knew that if the structure were removed, the problems associated with its existence would disappear. This concept presented a more proactive approach to the issue compared with the traditional reactive methods previously employed to curtail the problem.

Continued communication between officers and the property owner revealed her desire to have the building demolished, however, she was unable to financially pursue such an endeavor. This prompted officer Pfaffenbach to begin exploration of "non-traditional" strategies in an attempt to devise a solution. Adhering to the Phoenix Police Department's community-based policing philosophy, **PROJECT CLEAN SWEEP** emerged.

From the onset, the main objective of **PROJECT CLEAN SWEEP** was to rid the neighborhood of an unsafe and unsightly problem and to gain community involvement in the process. Officer Pfaffenbach believed that having the Phoenix Police Department arrange for the destruction of the structure was not the complete solution. It was essential to involve and organize the community toward this common goal, which is what he did.

Officer Pfaffenbach believed that the actual destruction of the building could be accomplished in a constructive manner - a controlled burning. This would eliminate the problem source while simultaneously providing a rare training exercise for fire department recruits.

Officer Pfaffenbach, after receiving approval from the property owner, began soliciting assistance from various groups to donate their services to accomplish **PROJECT CLEAN SWEEP**. Included were the Phoenix Fire Department to control the burning of the building; the Northwest Phoenix Block Watch Coalition to coordinate and organize volunteers to help clean up the rubble; and IDRA Inc., a local demolition company to haul the rubble away.

Prior to the start of any of the aforementioned activities, it was necessary to research and obtain numerous permits. These consisted of a dumping permit, a demolition permit, an open burning permit, asbestos particle testing, burn site inspection, air quality control inspection, and zoning site inspection. Officer Pfaffenbach volunteered in excess of 100 hours of his off-duty time to procure the aforementioned permits. Due to the nature of the program, all of the permit fees were either waived or assumed by volunteering agencies. In addition, two local television stations and a newspaper journalist reported on the story. This media coverage assisted in the acquisition of additional support from the community.

On March 2, 1994, after only two months of planning, officer Pfaffenbach set **PROJECT CLEAN SWEEP** in motion. The Phoenix Fire Department burned the building through a controlled training exercise that included recruits from three other agencies. Members from the surrounding community and businesses were invited to watch the event. Spurred by the media involvement, a local fast food chain and grocery store provided food

and beverages to the volunteers participating in the activities. Members of officer Pfaffenbach's family and squad unit also volunteered their time and energy in making **PROJECT CLEAN SWEEP** a success.

Following the burning of the structure, other volunteer groups began assisting with the clean-up process. Within 10 days, all debris had been removed from the site.

Officer Pfaffenbach's **PROJECT CLEAN SWEEP** was a resounding success resulting in numerous benefits to the community. These include the elimination of criminal activity once associated with the building and the surrounding property; the creation of a safer environment for nearby residents; the strengthening of neighborhood associations; the savings of thousands of dollars to the financially strained property owner; and the provision of invaluable training to fire department trainees. In addition, officer Pfaffenbach served to strengthen the relationship between the Phoenix Police Department and other members of the community in his dedication and perseverance in this matter.

The combined efforts of the Phoenix Police and Fire Departments, other City Agencies, private businesses, community groups, and neighbors would not have transpired without officer Pfaffenbach's initiative and diligence. Through his efforts, crime and its associated fears have been reduced in the immediate community, resulting in an overall improvement in the quality of life experienced by area residents. These resolutions model the desired

outcomes promoted by the Community-Based Policing philosophy practiced by each member of the Phoenix Police Department.