

**2008 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in  
Problem-Oriented Policing**

**Submission**

Johnson City Police Department  
Johnson City, Tennessee

May 30, 2008

**Building on Success:  
Citizens' Police Academy  
Citizens' Police Academy Alumni Association  
Junior Police Academy**

## Summary

Project Title: Citizens' Police Academy/Citizens' Police Academy Alumni Association/Junior Police Academy

Scanning: A perceived lack of partnership between the Police Department and the public, one based upon mutual understanding and open and timely communication, hindered optimal and comprehensive police service.

Analysis: A means was needed by which the Police Department could improve lines of communication and mutual understanding with citizens from a wide representation.

Response: The Police Department developed and implemented, in turn, a Citizens' Police Academy, Citizens' Police Academy Alumni Association, and Junior Police Academy as part of its strategy to improve police-community partnership and understanding.

Assessment: The Citizens' Police Academy, Citizens' Police Academy Alumni Association, and the Junior Police Academy have all achieved the results for which they were designed and helped solve the stated problem through opening up lines of communication and mutual understanding.

## **Description**

### **Scanning**

Like many law enforcement agencies in the early 1990s, the Johnson City Police Department was actively developing means by which it could effectively deal with the profusion of illegal drugs and the drug culture. This was particularly applicable to the crime and disorder brought about by the nationwide crack cocaine epidemic, which was gaining momentum from its inception in the late eighties.

These problems were of particular concern in the Johnson City Housing Authority (JCHA) developments, determined from calls for service in these areas, drug arrests, and other criminal activity. A sample data set from the years 1996/1997 is illustrative, as 15.8% of calls for service originated from the Housing Authority areas. These areas at the time contained only 3% of Johnson City's population, indicating a disproportionate percentage of criminal activity when compared with the City as a whole. In arrests, 25% of the total number occurred within the housing development areas. Furthermore, violent offenses indicated a greater proportion in these areas, as illustrated: robbery (29%), domestic violence (34%), rape (7.6%), aggravated assault (5.5%), and homicide (75%).

Most of the citizens living in the Housing Authority developments were as frustrated as the Police and JCHA management. Surveys of the residents in these areas indicated significant concern over a plethora of drug trafficking indicators, such as trespassers (17%), loiterers (18%), unsupervised juveniles (21%), public drinking (46%), dropouts

(19%), drug abuse (28%), drug dealing (22%), and fights and disturbances (25%). Many of the residents were not accustomed to working in partnership with the police, and there were also many who were afraid to work with the police for fear of retribution from the criminal element and/or mistrust, and lack of a unified forum.

Contributing to this was the largely 911-driven police service provided by the Johnson City Police Department, which was still very common at this time before the community policing concept enjoyed wholesale adoption in law enforcement at every level. This perceived lack of partnership served as a barrier to communication between residents, who know what is happening in their communities, and the police, who are sworn to serve and protect, but whose knowledge of emerging or recalcitrant problems is limited by their observations and the level of communication with residents and other stakeholders.

This example of what was occurring within the housing developments and environs, especially with regard to citizen trust and partnership, made it quite evident early on that securing citizen trust and educating citizens to the scope and limits of law enforcement, and more importantly, building a sense of trust and partnership, were paramount considerations toward a solution.

The problem may be defined thus: A perceived lack of partnership with the public, one based upon mutual understanding and open and timely communication, hindered optimal and comprehensive police service.

## **Analysis**

Johnson City Police administrators and the director and management of the Johnson City Housing Authority, noting the increase in calls and the reduction in quality of life among residents, began to examine viable, cooperative solutions to apply to the problem.

This collaborative effort eventually led to the initiation of a specific community policing intervention within the Housing Authority developments, under the Public Housing Drug Elimination Program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. With this grant program, the Police Department was contracted for the delivery and concentration of community policy within these areas, which included hiring several officers in order to provide this increased level of service. Over the course of several years, the Police Department, Housing Authority, residents, and other stakeholders effected a turnaround in the JCHA developments, driving down crime and disorder through a number of programs and initiatives. Communication was the heartbeat of gains made, and education of the public to understanding their Police Department's role played no small part.

And so, it is no accident that parallel to the development of the community policing initiative in public housing, the Police Department sought to open avenues of understanding beyond the Housing Authority to the general public. As an accredited agency through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, the Johnson City Police Department is required to complete an annual citizen attitude and perception survey. This survey is distributed to a wide spectrum of residents in Johnson

City, and by and large shows a positive perception of the Police Department and its personnel. However, the purpose of the survey is to assist agencies in *improving* service and community buy-in, and the negative comments were as valuable as the positive. It was imperative that citizens understand police culture and what officers deal with in order to make informed judgments and fully contemplate a citizen's role in this partnership.

Based upon research and successes of similar programs, the administration of the Johnson City Police Department and the Department's Community Relations and Training Units explored the viability of such a program provided to interested residents.

## **Response**

### Citizens' Police Academy

The Johnson City Citizens' Police Academy (CPA) was developed by the aforementioned staff of the Police Department with the goals of

- educating the public concerning the role of police work in modern American society;
- building relationships with citizens from a broad community representation;
- learning the concerns of citizens and how they can partner with local law enforcement to address these concerns;

- provide an informed citizenry for supporting the efforts of law enforcement.

Although some modifications have occurred to fine-tune the Johnson City Citizens' Police Academy, the program has maintained these same objectives and, by and large, the same format. The program consists of 48 hours of police training including hands-on instruction. Areas introduced to CPA participants include traffic stops, special operations such as SWAT and canine unit, vice and narcotics investigations, firearms, self-defense instruction, ride-alongs with officers, and the function of 911. All of the instruction for the classes is provided by Johnson City Police Department personnel of all ranks and assignments, from Police Chief John Lowry to the front-line patrol officer.

Candidates for the Citizens' Police Academy must be at least 21 years of age, have no criminal history other than traffic violations, be physically able to participate in the training, attend ten weekly sessions, and ride with a patrol officer for two shifts.

Upcoming CPA classes are advertised in the Johnson City Press with a brief review of the scope of the course, requirements, and an invitation for applicants. Often, officers of the Department have the opportunity in their day-to-day contacts (e.g., in neighborhood association meetings) to encourage citizens to apply. The curriculum is designed to give participants a complete experience of what police work entails, as the Spring 2008 class demonstrates:

**2008 Citizens Police Academy Class # 33**

(April 15 thru June 10)

Overview of Course

**Session # 1** Welcome and Introduction

April 15

**Session # 2** Traffic Stops and Witness ID

April 22

**Session #3** Use of Force and Shoot/Don't Shoot

April 29

**Session # 4** DUI Enforcement

May 6

**Session # 5** SAFE CART Program

May 13

**Session # 6** Crime Scene Investigation

May 20



**Session # 7** Firing Range

May 24 Saturday 8:30 a.m.

**Session # 8** Special Operations Part I (DTF, K-9)

May 27

**Session # 9** Special Operations Part II (EOD, SWAT, Bicycle, etc.)

June 3

**Session # 10** Graduation

June 10

Class Time 32 hours

Ride-Along 16 hours

**48 hours**

Since its beginning, the Citizens' Police Academy has remained immensely popular. The classes are held to about 30 participants, although some may go over this number in order to accommodate the number of applicants. To date, there have been a total of 33 CPA classes held in Johnson City and at 30 per class, the number of graduates comes just under 1,000 citizens.

### Citizens' Police Academy Alumni

An innovation that has developed from the Johnson City Citizens' Police Academy has given graduates the opportunity to stay involved with the Police Department and their communities. At the conclusion of the course, graduates are invited to join the Citizens' Police Academy Alumni Association. This organization meets once a month and provides additional policing-relevant training opportunities and other programs. This innovation cements the positive relationship between the Police Department and citizens. Because of their unique experience, members of the CPA and its Alumni Association often have the opportunity to inform fellow citizens of the role of the Police Department, and advocate for support and cooperation in their public safety mission.

Members of the CPA Alumni Association regularly participate in a variety of projects and activities sponsored by the Johnson City Police Department. These include serving as volunteers at special programs such as the popular, annual "Say Yes to Fishing and Say No to Drugs" event, the police-sponsored annual buy-out at a Johnson City Cardinals minor league baseball game, and the Fourth of July fireworks celebration at Freedom Hall Civic Center. Members of the Alumni Association also often commit to serving in the Police Department's volunteer parking enforcement and volunteer report-taker programs.

It should be noted that the Citizens' Police Academy and Alumni Association also serve a recruitment function as well, as the Johnson City Police Department has hired a number of graduates as police officers, records clerks, jailers, and 911 dispatchers over the years.

### Junior Police Academy

The latest progeny of the Citizens' Police Academy was initiated in June 2006 – the Junior Police Academy. The concept behind this innovation was similar to the CPA: building relationships, learning and responding to the concerns of community youth, and educating them about the scope, responsibilities, and challenges of law enforcement. The academy is geared toward area youth, both males and females, between the ages of 14 and 18, and as with the CPA, the application process is advertised in the newspaper.

The Junior Police Academy focuses on youth and young adults who have an interest in the law enforcement profession, and was designed to take the mystery out of police procedures and policies while informing and educating the cadets involved toward police officers and their role in society. The cadets attend a 40-hour course climaxing in a team-oriented competition that involves skills, knowledge, and abilities they have learned through interesting and knowledgeable instruction.

During this week of instruction, the cadets experience what it is like to go through a real police academy and, although not as comprehensive or demanding, the cadets learn the same skills. In the words of Chief John Lowry, "The purpose of the Junior Police Academy is to provide a service to the youth of this area by allowing them to see first-hand what a police officer does on daily basis, and to give them the opportunity to discover if this is a career that they might want to pursue". It is also designed to aid in adding potential participants to the Johnson City Police Department's Explorer Program.

The Johnson City Police Department is preparing to provide its fourth Junior Police Academy in July 2008.

### **Assessment**

All three of the programs discussed in this submission were designed to open lines of communication with the citizens of the Johnson City and their Police Department, to contribute to a true partnership and open communication with the end result of enhanced safety and security and improved quality of life citywide. It is understood that these programs are only *one* facet of this goal, and that to be truly successful, other interventions must be employed and capitalized on. This is why the Johnson City Police Department maintains an active community relations, community policing, problem solving program and philosophy, and is committed to working with residents and other stakeholders on many levels.

Qualitative information relative to the success of the programs may be represented by the comments several participants, as follows:

“[I] look at a police officer as a human being instead of someone with a uniform and a badge.”

“I have a greater appreciation for the work the officers do and feel I can be an informed citizen.”

“I have gained a better overall picture of the police officer’s role in the community and will work better with them in the courtroom in the future.” [public defender]

“It’s been a fascinating nine weeks. And the 25 or so members of the group have learned a lot about being a police officer. Indeed, we all have greater respect for the officers and the trials and tribulations they face.” [local newspaper columnist in his column]

In a previous section of this narrative, the Police Department’s citizen survey was noted as an instrument for determining citizen perception and satisfaction with its Police Department. As stated, this survey is provided to a wide representation of residents. The following data from the 2008 survey indicate several encouraging trends and generally high marks in the perception of residents.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you rate the Police Department in the following areas?

A. Overall competence and job performance of the Police Department employees?

5	4	3	2	1
<b>219/36%</b>	<b>264/43%</b>	<b>92/15%</b>	<b>21/3%</b>	<b>17/3%</b>

B. If contact were made with an officer of the Police Department during the past twelve months, how would you rate that officer’s attitude and behavior?

5	4	3	2	1
<b>247/48%</b>	<b>128/25%</b>	<b>82/16%</b>	<b>29/6%</b>	<b>26/5%</b>

C. Overall, how would you rate officers of the Police Department in performing their duties without regard to race, ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, religion, economic status, age, cultural group, or disability?

5	4	3	2	1
<b>291/49%</b>	<b>180/30%</b>	<b>79/13%</b>	<b>23/4%</b>	<b>23/4%</b>

D. Overall, how would you rate the Police Department in providing protection in your community?

5	4	3	2	1
<b>242/40%</b>	<b>235/38%</b>	<b>90/15%</b>	<b>27/4%</b>	<b>16/3%</b>

The Citizens' Police Academy, Citizens' Police Academy Alumni Association, and the Junior Police Academy have all achieved the results for which they were designed and helped solve the stated problem through opening up lines of communication and mutual understanding.

## **Agency and Officer Information**

As may be imagined, it takes significant time and commitment to maintain a Citizens' Police Academy, not to mention an Alumni Association and Junior Police Academy. Officers must commit quality time and energy to both preparation and presentation of lessons, as well as engaging the participants in the hands-on activities. This is time that could be spent in any number of other duties, however, the leadership of this organization is committed to the necessity of these programs for the police-community benefits they yield. The same may be said of the participating officers, to whom these benefits are evident.

As far as lessons learned, expansion of the program into a youth outreach became evident a few years ago, and was proposed and developed by the Community Policing Unit sergeant and the Community Relations Officer. Young people are indeed the future of this City and their community, and so the efforts to gain understanding and help them see officers more as partners in community safety are immediately apparent.

Project Contact Person: John Lowry

Position/Rank: Chief of Police/Johnson City Police Department

Address: 601 E. Main St.

City/State: Johnson City, Tennessee

Phone: (423) 434-6159

Fax: (423) 434-6154

Email: [jdlowry@johnsoncitytn.org](mailto:jdlowry@johnsoncitytn.org)