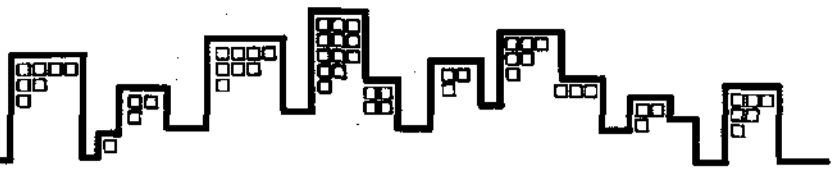


# Keys to the City



Problem Solving in the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department

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SEPTEMBER, 1993

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## **Public Housing**

Since May of this year, **Ninth District Police Officer Allen Moore** has been working with residents and employees of the Blumeyer Housing Complex. His involvement started when he, **Lieutenant Tom Zipf, Sergeant Guinn Kelly, Sergeant Steve Harmon, Officer Greg Newhouse** and **Officer Jim Mader** met with residents of the Blumeyer community. Nearly four hundred people attended the meetings and voiced their concerns to the officers.

The most common complaints were about large groups of kids congregating on the corners, non-residents coming into the area, drug sales throughout the neighborhood, and management's failure to make minor repairs to the apartments and buildings.

Over the next few weeks, the officers worked on solutions to some of these problems. Several ideas, such as issuing building identification cards and parking passes to the residents were considered.

In July of this year, local public housing authorities accepted an invitation from **Housing and Urban Development (HUD)** to participate in a program to improve the quality of life for public housing residents.

A committee was formed to design the local program. The members of the committee, chosen because of their involvement with the Blumeyer community, included **Officer Moore, Matthew Carter** (Resident Initiatives Coordinator), **Yvette Clark** (Blumeyer Tenant Affairs), **Paula Foster** (President of Blumeyer Tenant Affairs Board), **Danny Henderson** (Director of Housing Management), **Minister Ike Hentrel** (Scruggs C.M.E. Church), **Arnetta Kelly** (Director of Blumeyer Youth Services), **Sandra Norman** (Coordinator of Student Volunteer Program at St Louis University), and **Al Wilson** (Chief of Security, St. Louis Housing Authority).

HUD sponsored a national conference in Denver entitled "Prevention in Housing Communities Training," to discuss problems and solutions for improving the quality of life in these communities. Eight cities, including St. Louis, were represented at this conference. The Blumeyer group represented St. Louis.

Prior to attending the conference, this **Ad-Hoc Committee for Blumeyer** conducted some research to better understand the problems in the Blumeyer complex. Committee members designed a community questionnaire. Each member of the com-

mittee interviewed ten people who regularly interact with Blumeyer Housing. Some interviewed residents while others interviewed workers and employees. Officer Moore interviewed Ninth District police officers.

The survey results suggested that the residents, the police, and management each perceived the community's problems differently. The main concerns of the residents were gangs, drug sales, and trespassing violations. Police officers saw the top problem as lax enforcement by management to remove troublesome tenants. Management felt that the lack of resident involvement in the community was the problem, citing, for example, poorly attended job and education fairs held for residents of Blumeyer.

Ironically, when residents were asked if they would participate in events sponsored by the housing management, the answer was "no" more often than not. The residents distrusted management because of past failures to attend to tenants' needs. The residents complained that requests for minor repairs to the building went unanswered. They felt that if management could **not** take care of the small problems - replace burned out light bulbs or repair torn screen doors - it was unlikely they could address the

see Housing p.2

Housing, from p.1 more serious issues.

At the national conference each committee described their problems. By the end of the first day, Officer Moore realized that other cities were attempting to address the same problems as St. Louis. Residents of Oklahoma housing projects felt the same way toward their management and police officers in New Mexico cited the same problems as our officers.

The remaining four days of the conference were spent developing response strategies. The first instinct of the committee members was to adopt a policy to strictly enforce lease agreements, rewrite leases to make them more restrictive, and enforce trespassing violations and other minor offenses.

After some debate, however, they agreed that, under present conditions, this strategy would only be viewed hostilely by the residents, reinforcing their beliefs that management was unconcerned about them. The committee also realized that this enforcement strategy would be time consuming and require constant monitoring. More importantly, it did not include the residents' participation as part of the solution. The committee concluded that the relationship between management and tenants must first be improved.

The committee then decided that the first step toward improving the strained relationship will be to involve residents in making decisions that affect their neighborhood. They will accomplish this through a tenant

affairs board, to be made up of, and chaired by, Blumeyer residents. This board will recommend improvements in the complex to the Housing Authority.

The next step will require management to make the minor repairs to the building. By replacing torn screen doors and broken windows, managers will seek to improve residents' trust in them. Additional training in human behavior for the security staff and other employees is also being considered.

Upon returning to St. Louis, the Ad-Hoc Committee began to implement their strategy. Management has begun to make the needed maintenance repairs. The tenant board is in place and gaining some notoriety among the residents. The committee has requested additional funding from HUD to bring a facilitator to St. Louis to offer additional training. Toward the end of summer, after the tenants begin to see the positive change in their community, the Housing Authority plans to host a summer fair. The fair will include family entertainment and offer job and education fairs as well.

This is but the first part of a long-term strategy to re-establish order and a sense of community pride in a troubled public housing complex.

### Shoplifting

In February of this year, Seventh District Officer Fran Krupp was working secondary employment at Dillard's Department Store downtown, when she arrested a 39 year old man for shoplifting. The man, Marion G., was caught stealing an alarm clock.

After taking Marion to the security office, Fran began filling out a summons release form. When Marion realized he was not going to be booked, but instead released with a summons, he started crying and begged Fran to take him to jail were he would be fed and given a place to sleep for the night. Fran was curious why arrest, far from being a deterrent, had actually become the incentive for this man to commit a crime.

Marion explained to Fran that he stole from the St. Louis Center almost daily and sold the goods on the street. He used the money for food and transportation to the Veterans Administration Hospital where he was receiving outpatient care for a mental disorder.

As Fran continued the interview she learned that without medication, Marion claims to hear voices that tell him to do weird things. Several years ago he was judged incompetent to handle his own affairs and, consequently, his disability checks are delivered to a payee, in this case his mother in Illinois. Sometime last year, Marion's mother put him out of the house, but she continues to cash the checks.

Fran realized that there was little she could do that evening, but she gave Marion enough money for food and transportation to the hospital and instructed him to meet her at the shopping center the following day.

The next day, Fran contacted a counselor from the Harbor Light Shelter and explained these circumstances. The counselor told Fran that the Harbor Light could become the payee

for Marion and help him recover from his illness. They would provide room and board for as long as he needed it and through their pharmacy program he would always have a supply of his medication.

When Marion returned to Dillard's the following afternoon, Fran arranged for the two of them to go to the Harbor Light Shelter. The counselor started the paper work that would allow Marion to re-assign a payee for his disability check.

Several months have passed and Fran reports that Marion has not been seen in the St. Louis Center.

### **Vandalism, Graffiti**

In its first week of operation, the new light rail system, Metro Link, attracted nearly 200,000 riders, far more than Bi-State Development Agency anticipated. The public reaction has been overwhelmingly positive. Working behind the scenes, several Seventh District officers sought to eliminate potential trouble spots on the light rail before they became serious problems.

During its construction, Seventh District Officers John Ackerman, Lieutenant Wayne Keasling, Sergeant Jeff Kowalski and Sergeant Don Frenzel had the opportunity to ride the train through the Seventh District. This gave the officers a perspective from which they could identify potential public safety problems.

Their first areas of concern were the viaducts over the tracks. The officers felt that the overpasses created an attractive nuisance, inviting people to

drop or throw things at passing trains. They believed a simple solution would be to install a fence hood under each side of every viaduct. The fence would catch or deflect large objects dropped from the viaduct. Bi-State officials agreed with the officers' recommendations and installed the fencing.

Another area of concern was the absence of location markers along the train route. If an incident were to occur, train operators would have a difficult time reporting the exact location and responding personnel would have an equally hard time finding the location. Bi-State agreed with the recommendation to install mile markers every one-tenth mile along the route. The officers also hope to have the names of the streets that pass over the tracks posted on the overpasses.

Shortly after the station platforms were built, graffiti appeared on the concrete surfaces. The officers explained to Bi-State officials the urgency of removing the paint, citing the negative impact it will have on potential customers and surrounding residents. Bi-State has been quick to remove the paint.

When the train began its test runs, it passed by what once was the Des Peres Grade School at Des Peres and Westminster. Kids in the schoolyard would bombard the train with rocks and pieces of asphalt. The rocks came from the broken schoolyard blacktop.

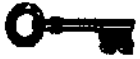
After handling several calls, Officer Ackerman suggested to the Board of Education and Bi-State officials that they repair and clean the schoolyard surface.

John correctly reasoned that if there was nothing to throw, the problem would be eliminated. Since the playground was repaired, there have been no reported incidents of vandalism to the passing trains.

To document some of their efforts, the officers videotaped the train route before they started their work and again after they finished. They credit much of their success to the cooperation they received from the Bi-State Development Agency.

### **KEY WORD INDEX**

| <u>Key Word</u>          | <u>Law No.</u>   |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Auto Theft               | 1,1;1,3;2,2      |
| Burg buy                 | 1,2:2,3          |
| Child Fatalities         | 2,4              |
| Derelect Autos           | 1,1:2,1          |
| Disorderly Tavern        | 1,2              |
| Disturbances             | 2,2              |
| Disturbances (Juvenile*) | 1,2;1,3          |
| DHturbancea (Parks)      | 1,3              |
| Drug Dealing             | 1,1;2,2;2,3      |
| Drug House               | 1,1;2,1          |
| Drunk ft Disorderly      | 1,2              |
| Elder Abuse              | 2,1              |
| Gang Activity            | 2,3;2,5          |
| Gang Graffiti            | 1,3              |
| Gasoline Driveoffa       | 2,4              |
| Graffiti                 | 2,6              |
| Hazardous Waste          | 1,2              |
| Intimidation             | 2,1;2,2          |
| Littering                | 1,2:2,1          |
| Loitering                | 2,3              |
| Motor Vehicle Accidents  | 2,2              |
| Noiae (Persons)          | 1,1              |
| Noiw (Vehicles)          | 2,2:2,4          |
| <b>Pushhandling</b>      | 1,2:2,1 ;2,3;2,5 |
| Puking Complaints        | 1,3              |
| Property Damage          | 1,2              |
| Public Drinking          | 2,1:2,3          |
| Public Housing           | 2,6              |
| Purse Snatching          | 1,1              |
| Recovering Stolen Autos  | 2,5              |
| Shootings                | 2,3;2,4;2,5      |
| Shoplifting              | 1,1-2,6          |
| Street Prostitution      | 1,1:2,3          |
| Theft From Auto*         | 1,3;2,3          |
| Theft (Cigarettes)       | 2,3              |
| Theft (License Tabs)     | 2,5              |
| Unsafe Building          | 1,2:2,3          |
| Vacant Building*         | 2,1              |
| Vacant Lots              | 2,1              |
| Vandahsm                 | 1,2:2,6          |



## DOWN THE ROAD

### **Is Community-Oriented Problem Solving here to stay or will it go the way of Team Policing?**

For those who were around during the time of Team Policing, they remember two things: it was a good idea for street police officers but it could not survive without the support of top management. Interestingly, another failed idea of the past was the FLAIR vehicle locator system, which seemed like a good idea to top managers, but could not survive without the support of street police officers. These two experiences taken together suggest that Community-Oriented Problem Solving will survive only if it proves a good idea to street police officers *and* has the support of top management.

Experiences from around the country during the past decade tell us that where community problem solving has failed, and it certainly has in some cities, it has not been because of the lack of support from street police officers. It is thriving in cities where top police managers and government officials are willing to give street police officers the trust and credit for thinking creatively about crime problems.

*Keys to the City is a regular publication of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department designed to share examples of good police-community problem solving in the City of St. Louis. Project descriptions should be sent to the COPS Coordinator's Office in Room 607 of Headquarters by departmental or electronic mail. Inquiries can also be directed to 444-5681.*

### **What is top management doing then to encourage supervisors and commanders to support the concept?**

Some of the supervisors and commanders have participated fully in training seminars on community problem solving. Some have gone through the training right with their officers. Also, the department has made the book, Problem-Oriented Policing, by Herman Goldstein the primary study text for the upcoming promotion exams for lieutenant and captain.

### **Is training continuing in community problem solving?**

Training seminars will resume in September with much of the training scheduled for the Third District. Some seminars were postponed during July and August because of the flood and vacations. Commanders and supervisors interested in scheduling training should contact the COPS Coordinator's office.

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