



LAW ENFORCEMENT

# Community Policing

Relationship building in Florida cities

by Vinny Kuntz

Many Florida departments have been instituting practices to strengthen community relationships and a sense of common bond between law-enforcement officers and all the community members they serve.

More and more cities in Florida are adopting community-policing practices to improve relations between local police and the communities they serve.

Efforts range from programs for at-risk youths to simple things like cops rolling down their cruiser vehicles' windows and chatting with residents. Police in **Temple Terrace**, for example, hold periodic Coffee with a Cop sessions at various venues around the city. The department says the purpose is to, among other things, facilitate honest discussions about community concerns related to law enforcement and public safety.

"Community policing is a philosophy," said **Major Kathy Katerman** of the **North Miami Beach Police Department**.\* The goal is to establish lasting, collaborative relationships, she added.

Following the August 2014 shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., and a string of other incidents around the country, **President Barack Obama** appointed the 11-member President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing in December of that year. The task force included leaders from law enforcement, police unions, academia, civil-rights

organizations and community members. Obama wanted the group to identify best practices and make recommendations about how policing practices could promote effective crime reduction and simultaneously build public trust.

After holding seven hearings that included 140 witnesses and considering other input, the task force delivered its final report in May. The group made 59 recommendations organized around six "pillars." The pillars included policy and oversight; ways to build trust and legitimacy; and community policing.

Community policing was defined as an organizational approach that uses community partnerships and activities, as well as proactive problem-solving methods, to address public safety issues such as crime and social disorder. Such steps can help ensure that communities have a voice in issues involving local law enforcement.

The task force's report gives Florida police valuable advice about how to identify ways that are and aren't working in efforts to improve community relations, said **Amy Mercer**, executive director of the Florida Police Chiefs Association (FPCA).

"We started on this long ago," said **Brett Railey**, chief of the **Winter Park**

\*In January, Major Kathy Katerman retired from the North Miami Beach Police Department after serving the city for 28 years. This interview took place before her retirement.

**Police Department** and executive-board president of the FPCA. “It’s too late if a crisis erupts . . . but it’s never too late (for a department) to start.”

Many Florida departments have been instituting practices to strengthen community relationships and a sense of common bond between law-enforcement officers and all the community members they serve. In North Miami Beach, for example, police officers try to communicate friendliness, trust and willingness to listen – as well as a certain vulnerability, Katerman said.

“We’re not better than the public. We have feelings too,” she said. “We don’t have to be tough soldiers all the time.”

In **Clearwater**, **Police Chief Daniel Slaughter** says his department’s efforts include community forums, service partnerships, programs for youths and in schools as well as events focusing on things such as crime prevention. He says he encourages his patrol-car officers to engage with people in the community, even about things that are not necessarily directly connected with law enforcement. “Park, talk and walk,” Slaughter said.

Many law-enforcement agencies in Florida cities have sought training in the specifics of community policing. More than 170 municipalities are among the 350-plus local, state and federal entities that have sent officers, deputies and employees to community-policing training classes provided by the Florida Regional Community Policing Institute, said **Todd Kirchgraber**, training director at the institute’s Center for Public Safety Innovation. The institute is based at St. Petersburg College.

The college was involved in a project that led to the Clearwater Police Department being named one of the winners of the International Association of Chiefs of Police’s annual Community Policing Awards in 2012.

The Clearwater department and its community partners – St. Petersburg College, the United Way of Tampa Bay and the Pinellas County School District – developed an innovative approach aimed at preventing at-risk youths from becoming part of the criminal justice system. For those juveniles already in trouble, the Operation Graduate program seeks to reduce recidivism.

## Resources About 21st Century Policing

In May 2015, the President’s **Task Force on 21st Century Policing** made 59 recommendations about how policing practices could promote effective crime reduction and build public trust at the same time. The suggestions were organized around six “pillars.” They are:

- » **Building Trust & Legitimacy:** Promote trust and ensure legitimacy through procedural justice, transparency, accountability and honest recognition of past and present obstacles.
- » **Policy & Oversight:** Develop comprehensive and responsive policies on key topics while also implementing formal checks and balances, and data collection and analysis.
- » **Technology & Social Media:** Balance use of technology and digital communications with local needs, privacy, assessments and monitoring.
- » **Community Policing & Crime Reduction:** Encourage the implementation of policies that support community-based partnerships in the reduction of crime.
- » **Training & Education:** Emphasize the importance of high quality and effective training with education through partnerships with local and national training facilities.
- » **Officer Wellness & Safety:** Endorse policies that support officer wellness and safety through the reevaluation of officer shift hours, data collection and analysis to help prevent officer injuries.

For more details about the task force and its recommendations: [cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/taskforce\\_finalreport.pdf](http://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/taskforce_finalreport.pdf)

The following link includes a tab titled “Implementation Guide” that outlines methods local governments, law enforcement, communities and other stakeholders can employ to turn the task force’s recommendations into concrete actions: [cops.usdoj.gov/policingtaskforce](http://cops.usdoj.gov/policingtaskforce)

Another related resource is a report issued by the International Association of Chiefs of Police in January 2015. The report focused on the IACP’s National Policy Summit on Community-Police Relations, which was held in October 2014 in response to events in Ferguson, Mo., and elsewhere. The report – “Advancing a Culture of Cohesion and Community Trust” – is designed to serve as a guide for law enforcement, communities and stakeholders seeking to build meaningful, sustainable, trusting and effective working relationships. The report defines the three key elements – communication, partnerships and trust – and provides recommendations for improvement in each: [theiacp.org/Portals/0/documents/pdfs/CommunityPoliceRelationsSummitReport\\_Jan15.pdf](http://theiacp.org/Portals/0/documents/pdfs/CommunityPoliceRelationsSummitReport_Jan15.pdf)

The project provides teens with life and financial skills. The program aims to help the youths finish high school on time and also expose them to the possibility of college or further training. The results have been promising. The teen participants indicated the program improved their knowledge about employability, jobs and life skills, organizers say. About 80 percent of the youths participating in one specific program track did not re-offend during the program, and all of those participating in another program track received a passing grade in the college courses in which they were enrolled.

For cities just starting out with community policing efforts, Clearwater's Slaughter emphasized the need to build bridges by engaging with community leaders, nonprofits and other local organizations.

In **Quincy**, **Police Chief Glenn Sapp** says his department makes a priority of building trust and positive relationships with residents. The police engage in community sports programs, mentor youths and collaborate with churches for what he called "faith-based crime prevention." During meetings at churches and other venues, residents and police discuss community concerns.

"We listen and allow citizens to voice concerns and recommendations," he said.

Quincy hasn't had the same type of problems as those that have erupted in Ferguson, Chicago and elsewhere, but the implications for police are clear: preventive measures are necessary before trouble happens.

"We need to tackle it at the front end," said Sapp, adding that citizen participation is key to the department's success.

"This game is not a spectator sport, and everyone needs to be involved," he said.

He spends much of his day driving around Quincy in his 2010 Ford Crown Victoria patrol car – and he said he always tries to ride with the windows down because it makes him more accessible to the people his department serves.

The Winter Park Police Department has a neighborhood advisory forum where 25 to 50 people a month meet with police and are informed about crime trends and asked for feedback. If citizens'

## Smaller City Efforts at Community Policing

In **High Springs**, police officers are on the lookout for children seen committing a random act of kindness or following safety rules such as wearing a helmet while riding a bicycle. Police issue the children a **Cookie Citation** that they can redeem for a freshly baked gourmet cookie treat at a local business. Other community-policing initiatives in the city include:

- » **Coffee with the Chief**, which is aimed at providing residents with an opportunity to meet **Police Chief Jack Anterio** in an informal setting such as a local coffee shop to discuss community matters of interest.
- » **Citizen Satisfaction and Safety Survey**, which provides a way for residents to give feedback to police about the quality of the work the department is accomplishing.
- » **Shop with a Cop**, a program where police officers go on a mini-shopping spree with needy area children.

tempers flare, Railey says he invites folks to engage in dialogue, and that's part of transparency.

"It's been an extremely valuable tool," he said. "It's a gloves-off, open forum."

Such bridge-building will benefit everyone if something like the incidents in Ferguson were to happen, he said.

Communication with the public is very important, and since the presidential task force delivered its report, Winter Park officers have stepped up their efforts to engage with the community, including vehicles such as social media, he said.

North Miami Beach's Katerman says the police department engages with residents, including children, via community activities; attempts to foster honest dialogues; communicates through newsletters and social media;

and practices follow-through and transparency.

Police forums for residents include discussions of public-safety issues that need resolution. Officers also reach out by going door-to-door to homes after people come home from work. If the residents aren't at home, officers leave business cards to let them know the department was there.

Other aspects include going to neighborhoods to discuss with residents the recent trends in area crime, she said. Officers also deliver gifts to burglary victims, hand out baskets at Thanksgiving and presents at Christmas time, check up on elderly residents, participate in school and sports programs, and have a Chief for the Day program for kids.

Clearwater has embraced a philosophy of community policing as an enhancement to traditional methods of law enforcement for more than 20 years. The effort has evolved into a comprehensive program consisting of problem solvers from various city departments acting in concert with the city's businesses and residents to address challenges facing the city.

Slaughter emphasizes the need for city police departments to take decisive action in the realm of community policing. He says the challenge has three components for police: Embracing the status quo and playing it safe is dead. Police can't sit back. It's time to take it to the next level.

His department holds forums for citizens, participates in community partnerships and conducts crime-prevention events. Officers are engaged in youth and school programs and activities such as Officer Friendly book clubs. One effort is a joint literacy program between the department and the Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County. An officer spends about 30 minutes reading the book of the month to preschool children.

Winter Park's Railey says reaching out to the community must be the police department's culture. Police need public approval to be effective, and officers must have respect for residents and vice versa. The public needs to believe the department is fair, he said.

"That's what community policing is about: legitimacy."

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