

# Campus Community Policing: It All Started With Us...

By Dr. Gary J. Margolis, Chief of Police, University of Vermont and Noel C. March, Chief of Police, University of Maine

It all started with us...or so we're reminded when we look at the history of proactive, preventative, relationship-oriented, community-focused policing. The first police in the United States to embrace the kind of community-focused policing that "modern" law enforcement embraces, and which was extolled by Sir Robert Peel in 1826, were the New Haven, Connecticut police officers hired by Yale University in 1894 to patrol and keep order on campus. Why did Yale not simply rely on the New Haven Police? They understood that a community of learners needs a police service that resonates with the educational mission of the institution. They knew that students, faculty, staff and parents lived with an expectation that campus public safety agencies serve their community through a focused balance of law enforcement and prevention, and they recognized that other police entities sought a different balance between their various roles and expectations. They embraced community policing principles, which wouldn't be adopted by mainstream, modern policing in this country for another 75 years.

How do we know this philosophy has operational validity in delivering the critical services to which campus public safety agencies are committed? A recent report issued by the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, states that even in light of the recent tragedies of gun violence that have found their way to some of our colleges and universities, college students today are safer the minute they step foot on a college cam-



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pus. Why? Because community oriented policing is the dominant strategy for contemporary public safety agencies at the majority of our nation's 4,200 colleges and universities. According to a recent survey by the U.S. Department of Justice, about two-thirds (69%) of campus law enforcement agencies had incorporated community policing into their campus security policy. Most agencies (59%) assigned patrol officers to specific geographic areas on campus. About half (51%) had upgraded technology to support community policing efforts and collaborated with citizen groups, using their feedback to support community policing strategies<sup>1</sup>.

It is expected. The community policing philosophy is a natural fit for an educational environment given the very nature of our communities and the developmental, preventative focus of our student affairs colleagues. Universities and colleges promote a culture of involvement and responsibility through active dialogue, engaging discourse and community development. Community policing works for these very same reasons. The Department of Justice survey findings demonstrate that this culture of involvement is common

practice at U.S. colleges and universities. Regular meetings with various groups played an important role in campus community policing efforts. During the 2004-05 school year, 88% of agencies serving public and private campuses met regularly with other law enforcement agencies and with on- and off-campus groups and organizations — such as student housing groups (86%), faculty/staff organizations (84%) and student organizations (83%) — to discuss crime and safety-related problems on campus<sup>2</sup>.

Furthermore, at the core of community policing is an educational and preventative philosophy that focuses on engagement and partnership to solve security and safety concerns. Let's examine a few of the reasons why community oriented policing (COP) is working as a model of success at our institutions that employ the principles and implement them effectively.

COP works at educational institutions because of the vested, committed nature of the campus community. Our students (and their parents, in many cases) are leveraging a substantial financial investment to acquire an education that will serve them for life. They recognize that college is more than taking classes and that opportunities abound for involvement. The very nature of this involvement is at the core of COP. The right people are already "on the bus and in the right seats," to paraphrase Peter Senge. COP works on-campus because our partnerships are easier to build, and maintain, when the

*Continued on page 23*

faculty, staff and students all share the ethos and culture of the institution. On average, universities and colleges expend a quantifiably large amount of human and financial resources building and maintaining their distinguishing brand identities. This shared experience is much more diffuse in a municipal or county setting, with some obvious exceptions found from time to time in resort and affluent communities. Our experiences inform us that while our students are, at times, making decisions that are not always ideal for their development and care, the majority of college-bound young adults share our goals of maintaining a safe community within which to live, learn and grow. Some of the strongest examples of this relationship on residential campuses are the shared connection and community focus that our students have found within the working relationships of campus public safety and residential life. At community colleges and commuter campuses we find the experience between campus public safety and the student government associations equally compelling in this regard. In either case, can you imagine a more perfect environment within which to build strong, healthy relationships with the very core constituency of our institutions, namely the *students*? The relationships they leave college expecting to find in the communities in which they settle will, in part, drive their community involvement. They will, in fact, know their role within the *community* part of *community policing*.

COP works on campuses when public safety officers connect with their institutional colleagues (students, faculty and staff) to find solutions to quality-of-life issues unique to a campus. When we visit institutions around the country we see countless examples of inspiring relationships between campus public safety officers and various campus constituencies, specifically with groups often marginalized by society and the police. Rebuilding a historical lack of trust with members of our LGBTQA Community (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Questioning and Allies) and ALANA Community (African, Latino, Asian & Native American) has proven invaluable and criti-

cal for their sense of safety on our campuses. This works only through a community policing philosophy and we see similar gains in relationships with our Greek Systems and Women's Centers as we work to build places free of crime and disorder for our students and empower survivors of violence-against-women crimes to rise through their experiences to places of advocacy and strength. Similar gains are seen with strong bonds to our student-athletes and our student governance structures. Campus public safety professionals cannot achieve their mission in a vacuum and community policing on a college campus has proven to be the path to success.

The college-age student community is a tough audience. They expect adults and authority figures to "prove themselves" before their respect will be freely given, so says the current thinking on the outlook and perspectives of the so-called "Millennial Generation."<sup>3</sup> How fortunate we are, then, in light of this challenge, that we can perform our public safety mission of service, education and protection by being "*a part of*" the community rather than being "*from apart*" the community, as are so many of our non-campus counterparts. Being closely integrated and engaged with our community of students means they witness our actions and affirm our commitment. Even the smallest details support our community policing goals...for example, every business card carried and distributed by Public Safety Officers at the University of Maine features this message on the reverse side: "Our Students Come First: The student is the most important person on this campus. Without them, there would be no institution. We are dependent on them. They are not to be hurried away so we can do our own thing...they are our thing. They are not an interruption to our work but the purpose of it." University of Vermont Police Services staff affirms their pledge to the campus by affixing their signature on a large (2' x 3') values statement hanging at the entrance to the department. Officers are then assigned in teams to residence halls and key academic/administrative departments with a focus on solution-based policing strategies. At UMAINE officers are actually is-

sued "deeds" to buildings to secure their sense of ownership. The UVM Police Services and Residential Life partnership has become a hallmark of the kind of productive relationship between these campus services and our student population, and similar programs can be found around the country. Rice University Police and their student residential population have a similar relationship with one notable difference; their residential houses are student-governed with no residential hall staff present. This requires an even greater finesse in the student-police partnership. UVM Police and the Student Government Association, in collaboration with the Inter-Residence Association (IRA), which represents students in the residential halls, launched a door locking campaign to prevent thefts and loss from unlocked residence hall rooms.

The University of Texas – Dallas Police Department coordinates with the Student Government Association for a "Know Your Rights Day" and successfully reduces common and long-standing misconceptions between students and law enforcement. The University of Miami Police Department has over 50 different programs on campus that include a School Resource Officer; the Good Behavior Reward Card Distribution Program; Lunch with the Chief of Police Program; and a Victim Advocacy Program. SUNY Buffalo implemented a successful community policing program to address vehicle burglaries. At the University of Connecticut, the police department actually teaches one section of the 1-credit "First Year Experience" course that all first year students take upon arrival at the university. The officers are part of the university community helping their students' transition from high school to college.

The Virginia Commonwealth University Police Department (VCUPD) in Richmond has trained *all* their personnel in community policing as their operational and guiding philosophy, and organizational strategy for more than 20 years. The VCUPD approach begins with their own *Campus On Watch* brochure and Personal Safety Awareness presentations for all new students, parents, staff and faculty. Their

Continued on page 25

objectives are quite simple: partnerships to do the problem solving and prevention that ward off crime and improve quality of life. They are a large university of 33,000 students on two metropolitan campuses and since "beginning" community policing their calls for service have increased from 20,000 to 120,000 while the population has tripled and their crime rate has decreased by half (1,200 to roughly 600-800 crimes per year). These impressive results soundly illustrate the value of their community policing efforts.

What is abundantly clear is that building a culture of partnerships and problem-solving within our agencies and on our campuses, and by educating our communities to the value of a relationship with their protectors, that the community policing philosophy on college and university campuses is the ideal operating philosophy. Recent studies comparing campus police organizations with our municipal and state counterparts have generated interesting findings on our role and efficacy. Campus constituencies have come to demand the same level of service from their campus police as they do from their municipal law enforcement agencies. In spite of these increased demands for similar service, the culture and climate of the campus police agency continues to be subtly different. Studies have shown that campus police see themselves more in the service-providing role than do their non-campus counterparts, who focus primarily on law enforcement. Campus police tend to concentrate first on crime prevention, and second on law enforcement, due to the educational mission of their institutions. This orientation toward providing police *service* is exactly what the law enforcement profession as a whole has attempted to accomplish these last 30 years in its shift to community policing. Municipal police agencies by design are more reactive, while campus police agencies have known a prevention orientation for the better part of the last century. Furthermore, when compared with our municipal counterparts, campus police employ more female and minority staffs, typically have higher educational standards, provide more training/

education per officer/employee, and make better use of community members in policing.

Policing a college campus demands a hybrid level of sensitivity and professionalism that resonates with the educational environment. Only through a combination of enforcement and education can we endeavor to achieve crime free campuses in accordance with many of our institutional core values. Only through the tenets of proactive, preventative, relationship-oriented, community-focused policing can we achieve the mission we've each pledged to undertake.

#### **About the Authors**

**Dr. Gary J. Margolis** has more than a decade of experience in higher education public safety as the Chief of Police at the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College. Under Dr. Margolis's leadership, the University of Vermont Police Department received international accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), where Dr. Margolis is now a Commissioner. He serves as advisor to the U.S. Departments of Justice and Homeland Security on matters related to campus safety and higher education security.

**Chief Noel C. March** is the Director of Public Safety for the University of Maine in Orono where he is responsible for a full-service community-policing agency of 35 employees providing around the clock law enforcement, parking, transportation, security and communications services to university students, faculty, staff and visitors.

#### **Notes**

1. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report, Campus Law Enforcement 2004-05, February 2008, p. 7. Brian Reaves, Ph.D., BJS Statistician.
2. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report, Campus Law Enforcement 2004-05, February 2008, page 7. Brian Reaves, Ph.D., BJS Statistician.
3. Weiler, A. (2005). "Information-Seeking Behavior in Generation Y Students: Motivation, Critical Thinking, and Learning Theory." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 31 (1): 46-53.

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