

Grassroots Alliance:

'A Great Relationship Between Business Leaders and the Police Department Contributed Significantly to the Success'

Fanwood, my hometown in central New Jersey, is small—only one square mile—but it is full of heart and strong on volunteerism. We have a full-time paid police force and a volunteer fire department and rescue squad.

Police Lt. Richard Trigo and Sgt. Thomas Jedic put out a notice last year that they wanted to start a community policing alliance. They invited local residents and people who work in Fanwood to join. At the first organizational meeting, police asked for our help in improving communication between the police department and the townspeople.

Although the police representative at meetings of the Fanwood Community Policing Alliance usually does most of the talking, the public decides what it wants to learn about. At some meetings, it's crime statistics and how we should be aware of burglary trends. At other meetings, we have focused on traffic safety and how to protect our children. The agenda is up to us.

The alliance, with about 10 active members, has received financial support from large and small local businesses. For example, Quick Chek, a local convenience store, recently contributed hundreds of empty prescription vials for the alliance's "vial of life" medical alert program. Residents can keep essential medicine in their refrigerator, with a sticker on the door informing rescue personnel to look for the vial.

Also, H&R Block Foundation donated \$3,000 to help start the alliance's Community Emergency Response Team. So far, the alliance has cost taxpayers nothing.

Word of mouth, the Internet, and e-mails have helped engender interest in Fanwood's Community Policing Alliance. A great relationship between key local business leaders and the police department contributed significantly to the success of the alliance. Finally, endorsement and support from our Fanwood Borough Council was a must.

Why the importance of the borough council? (In New Jersey, Fanwood's level of local government is designated a borough, not a town.) Alliance members wanted to operate within the jurisdiction of our borough rather than as a separate nonprofit. This was the best way to ensure that the alliance could meet and hold events on borough property and that the Fanwood Police Department could assign officers to attend. The alliance operates like the library— independently, yet connected and endorsed.

The alliance also wanted to ensure that it was the one official group linking the police and the community. Members thought that the community would feel more comfortable



By Michael Prasad, member of the Fanwood Community Policing Alliance in New Jersey

going to only one group for information. Endorsement and support of the Fanwood Borough Council also implies a sense of oversight, which is a plus when the alliance solicits help from businesses and individuals. Two members of the council are members of the alliance.

We have found the best way to keep the community involved is to identify issues of local interest and then turn them into projects. For example, we have started a Community Emergency Response Team as part of the Citizen Corps program associated with the Federal Emergency Management Agency. We also are producing a video for high school students on the dangers of drinking and driving. Helping with the video are volunteers from the high school and our fire department and rescue squads. We have hosted a child-safety fair, car-seat seminar, and child-fingerprinting sessions. We are working on a neighborhood watch program and an anti-litter campaign.

The Community Policing Alliance can be a catchall for small programs that the community wants and that involve the police or police resources.

In Fanwood, we are fortunate to have an abundance of police resources from our borough and from the Union

County Police Department, Union County Sheriff's Office, New Jersey Transit Police, and New Jersey State Police. Many of our events and ideas involve multiple jurisdictions and agencies. So far, everyone has been cooperative.

Word of mouth is the best way to start and sustain a community policing alliance, but we also use other methods. We send press releases to the local news media. We e-mail meeting schedules to a distribution list maintained by the borough, and we have our own Web site, too—

www.fanwoodcpa.org. The site contains summaries of our meetings, notices of our next meetings, safety tips, links to government resources, and just about anything else we can think of to benefit the community. The Web site is new and I think it will grow by leaps and bounds.

The Fanwood Community Policing Alliance is a grassroots effort. So long as officers are willing to take the time to educate and communicate directly with the public, an alliance can get started in any community. I feel fortunate that we have one in Fanwood, and I am honored to be a part of it.

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