



PALM BEACH COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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Citizen Observer Patrol

COP Dispatch and Patrol

The volunteer unit of the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office consists of two main components, the Citizens Observer Patrol (COP) and the administrative volunteers. The administrative volunteers perform many tasks for the agency. Their hard work maximizes the ability of sworn and non-sworn staff to accomplish important tasks and adds millions of dollars in value to the taxpayers of this county.

Our volunteers can be found in every area of the agency, from Crime Lab to Vehicle Maintenance. Their considerable skills and life experience add a dimension to the agency and create an opportunity for staff and volunteers to learn from each other.

Neighborhood Safety Centers are staffed by volunteers and are located in unincorporated areas of the county. These centers have a variety of services such as, fingerprinting, 911 cell phone giveaway, accident reports, and resource information for the Sheriff's Office and the community. The offices are open Monday to Friday. They are located at:

- Pine Trail Shopping Center, Okeechobee and Military Trail
- The Jewish Federation Center 95th street in Boca Raton
- Boca Del Mar Neighborhood Safety Center at Palmetto Park Circle North Boca Raton

For times and exact locations please call the Volunteer office at 561-433-2003.

What is The Citizen Observer Patrol (COP)?

The Citizen Observer Patrol(COP) is a volunteer unit of the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office and is the largest program of it's kind in the United States with over 4000 volunteers. The program is comprised of over 80 individual COP units from neighborhoods much like your own, that have decided to ensure the safety of their communities by forming a partnership with the Sheriff's Office. Volunteers wear distinctive uniforms and drive specially marked vehicles, all provided by the Sheriff's Office, that proudly display to any potential criminal that they are the eyes and ears of law enforcement within their community. There are mounted units in areas that require off road access in order to patrol properly. Several units have bicycle patrols in addition to the patrols in vehicles. The Citizen Observer Patrol program has emerged as a most effective approach to residential safety, awareness and involvement. By its' visibility in specially marked vehicles and personal identifications, the COP serves as a strong deterrent against unlawful actions of potential criminals. Considerable credit for the reduction of crime rates is attributed to the presence of the motorized Citizen Observer Patrols on the streets of participating neighborhoods, along with the continuous vigilance of individual Patrol members.



Who Is On The Citizen Observer Patrol?



A person is appointed as a Citizen Observer when they have met the designated application, background check and training requirements prescribed for the position. A Citizen Observer member has no law enforcement authority or power. Each COP unit and member is supervised by a sworn liaison deputy sheriff, who monitors the performance of the COP's.

The COP program itself is supervised by a Sheriff's Lieutenant. The individual units have a chain of command structure similar to the Sheriff's Office, with Captains, Lieutenants and Sergeants assisting in running the unit. The effectiveness of any neighborhood COP is totally dependent on the efficient management of the program by its volunteer patrol leaders, together with the loyalty and dedication of the individual members.

What Does A Citizen Observer Do?

Each COP vehicle is equipped with a radio and police scanner to assist COP volunteers in alerting deputies of any problems they might notice while patrolling their neighborhoods. A Citizen Observers job function is to patrol a designated area, to include area shopping centers, churches, synagogues, public facilities and schools; observe suspicious occurrences, people or objects; check closed houses, contact elderly and infirm individuals upon request. If a situation does arise, the Citizen Observer reports it via radio or hard-line phone to the complaint desk of the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office.



COP Vehicle

How is A Unit Run?



Once a month a unit meeting is held with the deputy assigned to the unit or a member of the COP Headquarters Staff. These meetings are mandatory and are designed to keep everyone in touch, discuss incidents that have happened since the last meeting and to keep training up to date. Once a month a Captain's meeting is held to discuss organizational issues with unit leadership. There is no limit on the number of hours a unit patrols its area. The more hours patrolled the more visible and effective the unit will be.

The Citizen Observer Patrol is one of many programs put forth and supported by the Sheriff's Office that demonstrates a commitment to putting the needs of the citizens first. The volunteer program provides a means where citizens can directly participate and interact with the local sheriff's department, thus establishing a partnership against crime for a better quality of life throughout Palm Beach County.

To apply for the Citizen Observer Patrol, please fill out, sign and return this

Volunteer Application form (90kb PDF)

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF CITIZENS ON PATROL

During World War II the nation's police forces lost many Officers to the armed forces as human resources were in great demand to support the war effort. In response to the loss, men and women volunteered to help the regular police with non-enforcement duties like traffic control and high visibility patrol acting as "Eyes and Ears" for law enforcement. Individuals who performed these functions were known as Auxiliary Police. Others were called Veterans Patrols because they were staffed by returning men and woman from World War II. When the war ended, so did many of the Auxiliary Police programs; however some remained and are still in use today such as the New York Police Departments 4,500 strong Auxiliary Police organization.

As crime began to rise again in the 1970's, law enforcement departments began to re-establish this once used community asset which today is commonly known as Citizens On Patrol. Today there are various names used to describe C.O.P.'s such as, Citizen Observer Patrols, Citizen Action Patrols, Citizen Action Teams, Citizen Support Teams, Retired Senior Volunteer Patrols, Volunteers On Patrol, Volunteers in Police Service, etc. However, regardless of the name, the mission continues to be the same for all, to provide extra "Eyes and Ears" for law enforcement while supporting agencies with non-enforcement duties such as traffic control, residential vacation checks and many more vital duties. Today there are an estimated 100,000 dedicated Citizen Patrol Volunteers throughout the United States and Canada serving in approximately 5,000 separate groups. We salute them all for their service!

WHAT ARE CITIZENS ON PATROL?

Citizens on Patrol are trained volunteers who donate their time and work together within a Citizen Patrol organization in their community. They assist and support law enforcement in the reduction of crime and improve overall quality of life by increasing the effectiveness of Police and Sheriffs. They accomplish this by acting as additional "Eyes and Ears" while on patrol, usually in marked patrol vehicles, looking for suspicious activity or crimes in progress at which time they will notify their police or sheriff's department. Citizen Patrol volunteers take no enforcement action and are unarmed. Additionally, they assist their law enforcement agency with basic functions or functions they may not normally be able to provide such as Traffic Control, Vacation Checks, Welfare Checks on Senior or Disabled Persons, Extra Patrol for areas experiencing Vandalism, Graffiti, Loitering, Car Theft, other crimes, as well as offer additional manpower for special events such as parades, fairs, and school or community functions. Many communities who have implemented a Citizen Patrol group see on average a reduction in crime of 20% and can save hundreds of thousands of dollars in their law enforcement budget. These cost savings can be used to hire additional officers, purchase new equipment, or be redirected to social or community projects.

As of March 2003, we estimate there are between 75,000 to 100,000 active COP volunteers across the nation representing over 5,000 Citizen Patrol organizations. In Southern California alone, we have identified at least 5,000 Citizen Patrol volunteers representing just 8 major countywide Citizen Patrol groups in a state with 59 counties. One major county Sheriff's department in Florida, the Palm Beach County Sheriff's

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Department, has over 5,000 active Citizen Patrol members alone! A recent inquiry utilizing a popular internet search engine, when queried for "Citizen Patrol Organizations", resulted in a response of over one million hits. Citizen Patrol organizations have been in use for over 50 years and are one of the best-kept secrets in Law Enforcement today.

Citizens on Patrol are also known as CAP's, Citizens Action Patrols, COP's, Citizen Observer Patrols, CVP's, Citizen Volunteer Patrols, VIP's, Volunteers in Policing or Partnership, RSVP's, Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol, SPOT, Seniors Patrolling Out Town and others names. The key theme with all Citizen Patrol groups is that the volunteers are average citizens from a variety of backgrounds, ages and locations who have come together to make a difference by helping to make law enforcement more effective and productive.

Citizen Patrol Volunteers initially receive a background check and training from their local law enforcement department which may include topics such as: First aid, CPR, Introduction to Law, Patrol Procedures, Traffic Control, Crime Prevention, Use of Two-Way Radios, Defensive Driver Training in addition to other topics. The Citizen Patrol organization may or may not be directly associated with the city's law enforcement department. Most Citizen Patrol organizations are affiliated with their law enforcement department or their city. However, there are a small percentage of Citizen Patrol groups who are independent from their local government. Generally speaking, these groups were created in this manner due to lack of support for a Citizen Patrol group by their local government or law enforcement agency at the time of their formation. However, the majority of these groups, once implemented and in use, end up receiving the support of local law enforcement and become a valuable resource for the agency.

CITIZENS ON PATROL SUCCESS STORIES

California - In 1999 Citizen Patrol volunteers, while on patrol, observed a "245 ADW", assault with a deadly weapon, in progress. They followed the suspect and called sheriff's dispatch with the license plate number of the vehicle. They continued to follow the suspect vehicle until Deputies arrived and made the arrest of the two felony suspects without incident.

Florida - This most significant event lead to the capture of a murder suspect in the getaway vehicle that had just killed a woman during a robbery. The Citizens On Patrol spotted the vehicle and followed it until police arrived and arrested the suspect.

California - During a major fire that occurred in the city about 5 years ago, the Citizens Patrol group worked for 48 hours nonstop with the Fire Department and law enforcement to help evacuate horses and livestock while also conducting traffic control around the fire area. Today there are many happy horses who are still alive thanks to the efforts of these Citizen Patrol Volunteers.

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California - Two Citizen Patrol Volunteers were on patrol and narrowly avoided being hit by a drunk driver. They looked behind them and observed the drunk driver hit another car head on. They radioed dispatch notifying them of the accident, and requesting an ambulance. The drunk driver got out of his vehicle and started to walk away while the volunteers followed the drunk driver at a safe distance. The accident occurred less than a block away from the Citizen Patrol office and both the dispatchers were also able to keep an eye on the driver while relaying the information to the sheriff's dispatcher. Within a minute, three deputies had the driver in custody. He was later found to have an outstanding "No Bail Warrant" for his arrest for a parole violation and was sent back to state prison.

Florida - A young girl was reported missing by her mother after not returning home from school. Police responded to the area along with Citizen Patrol volunteers to help in the search. Two C.O.P. members located the missing girl and returned her to a very grateful mother.

California - There have been several incidents over the years, one of them was when two Citizen Patrol Volunteers found a car, which had been involved in a fatal hit and run accident a few hours earlier, enabling the Deputies to identify and arrest the driver. The other involved an "off duty" Citizen Patrol Volunteer who observed a vehicle he remembered from a previous briefing as being stolen. After calling in the location to his station, a Deputy was able to recover the vehicle and arrest a suspect for Grand Theft Auto.

Canada - Citizens on Patrol were credited with rescuing and saving a young man's life after they found him lying face down and unconscious in a puddle on a construction site during the evening.

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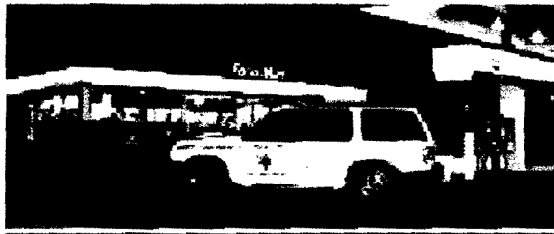


Citizens on Patrol in Action



CITIZEN PATROL VOLUNTEERS CONDUCT REGULARLY SCHEDULED PATROLS WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITIES TO WATCH OUT FOR SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITIES AND CRIMES IN PROGRESS, AID STRANDED MOTORISTS AND GENERALLY PROVIDE AN INCREASED LEVEL OF COMFORT FOR THOSE WHO SEE THE EXTRA PATROL ON THE STREETS.

A MAJOR FUNCTION OF MOST CITIZEN PATROL GROUPS IS TO PROVIDE AND ASSIST WITH TRAFFIC CONTROL AT THE SCENE OF AUTO ACCIDENTS OR OTHER INCIDENTS THAT OBSTRUCT THE ROAD AND CREATE A HAZARD. THIS ALLOWS LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL TO GO BACK ON PATROL AND FOCUS ON THEIR PRIMARY PURPOSE WHICH IS TO PREVENT AND STOP CRIME.



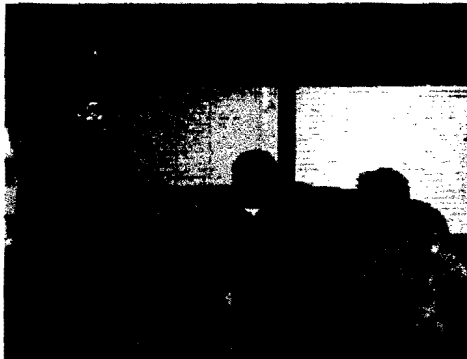
CITIZEN PATROL VOLUNTEERS CONDUCT ROUTINE CHECKS OF BUSINESSES BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER HOURS TO ENSURE ALL IS WELL AND REPORT ANY ACTIVITY THAT IS SUSPICIOUS IN NATURE OR TO FOCUS ON AREAS WHERE THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE IN CRIME.

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Citizens on Patrol in Action

CITIZEN PATROL GROUPS OFFER ROUTINE CHECKS FOR HOMEOWNERS THAT ARE AWAY ON VACATION OR EXTENDED PERIODS OF TIME. IN THE EVENT OF A NOTICEABLE PROBLEM, C.O.P.S CAN NOTIFY AN EMERGENCY CONTACT LEFT BY THE HOMEOWNER SO THEY MAY ADDRESS THE PROBLEM.



CITIZEN PATROL GROUPS AND VOLUNTEERS ALSO OFFER ROUTINE OR ON DEMAND SAFETY CHECKS OF SENIORS LIVING ALONE OR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE UNABLE TO MOVE ABOUT SUCH AS THE HANDICAP IN THEIR HOMES. THIS SERVICE IS VERY WELL RECEIVED BY THE COMMUNITY AND MOST PEOPLE REALLY APPRECIATE KNOWING SOMEONE WILL CHECK ON THEIR LOVED ONE AND OFFER ASSISTANCE IF NEEDED.

CITIZEN PATROL GROUPS PARTICIPATE IN MANY SPECIAL EVENTS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY. IN THIS PHOTO, A C.O.P. IS HELPING TO FINERPRINT YOUNG CHILDREN AND TEENS AT THE REQUEST OF THEIR PARENTS DURING A LOCAL SAFETY FAIR. MANY CITIZEN PATROL VOLUNTEERS ARE TRAINED TO PROVIDE THIS TYPE OF SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT.



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LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSPECTIVE

**Citizens' Patrol.
Are They Worth the Effort?**

by Officer Tom Carney

After 25 years in law enforcement I decided to try my luck at supervising a Crime Prevention/Community Relations Unit. Having experienced what I have throughout my law enforcement career, I felt I could share my knowledge and training with members of the community in an effort to help prevent some of the types of crimes I have investigated.

It wasn't until starting my new job in crime prevention that I realized just how integral and important volunteers can be to a successful community policing strategy. For the last 3 years my involvement with volunteers has greatly expanded, especially in the realm of our Citizens Patrol program. Working with our Citizens Patrol has proven to not only to be a rewarding experience, but an educational one as well. What I have learned is that a small group of dedicated men and women can be the catalyst for a growing trend that focuses on improving the communities' overall perception and fear of crime in their neighborhoods and business areas.

Crime prevention programs usually target a specific crime and as we all know, analyzing the program's effectiveness can be difficult, if not impossible. Regardless of the crime rate and the police departments efforts to control or lower it, having a community that perceives or fears that crime is taking over their neighborhoods and businesses, creates an obstacle for the police that can be difficult for them to overcome. However, creating a program that allows direct interaction with the community like the CitizensPatrol brings the obstacle into perspective and allows change to take place if the commitment from both sides is genuine.

From a law enforcement standpoint, by encouraging and supporting a Citizens Patrol, the police create a conduit that can be used to form a bond with the community it serves. Conversely, from a community standpoint, having a proactive and highly visible Citizens Patrol gives the community the ability to get involved in their police department's overall efforts to improve the local quality of life.

Not only should a Citizens Patrol be the "eyes and ears" of the police department, but it should take a stake in improving their community's future by encouraging their friends, neighbors and colleagues to get involved in any way they can. With the realization that "they" can be replaced with "we", the process of change can begin.



Officer Tom Carney is a veteran Police Officer with over 25 years experience in the field of Law Enforcement. His most recent assignment is with the City of North Miami Beach, Florida's Crime Prevention Unit as its Supervisor.

Officer Carney oversees the department's Citizen Patrol group and works with its volunteers to help reduce crime.

The article above is a reprint from the NACOP Winter 2001 Newsletter.