

Orchard Park Policing Challenges

Policing in our community has changed dramatically and on many levels in the last twenty years. Our calls for service have almost tripled (12,000 to 33,000). The types of calls have become more serious, requiring more training, intensive investigations, and in many cases specialized skills. Couple that with the increasing state and federal requirements, technology advancements, instant media, and increases in a variety of behavioral issues, and the job of policing has challenged us tremendously.

Our mission as Police Officers is put simply as “to Protect and Serve” our community. No longer do we only deal with simple criminal mischiefs, thefts, or vehicle and traffic issues. We are now regularly seeing felony assaults, domestics with arrests, weapon and drug issues and arrests, behavioral challenges, and computer and internet crimes. While most know that criminals do not respect the law, we also are learning that they are not limited by boundaries, be it physical or virtual (internet).

Currently our officers require almost 50 hours of training per year to meet the mandated minimums set by state and federal requirements. Additional training hours are required every year for assignments with special skills such as supervisors, detectives, accident investigators, field training officers, and instructors to name just a few. Training remains a key component to our agency. It is what keeps us ahead of the curve and relevant. It also protects our citizens and the town.

So what are our specific challenges in our community? First of all, our town is still growing. We are still seeing an increase in businesses and homes. With this comes an increase in demands for our services. Add to that, a distinct behavioral change from offenders. More offenders have become argumentative and non-compliant, in some cases almost immediately when interacting with police. Some of the people that we deal with on an ongoing regular basis have emotional and behavioral issues that require more training for our officers to help diffuse these situations, which can be dangerous and even deadly at times.

Supervision is our biggest immediate challenge. Currently almost one third of our patrol division is newer officers. This has the potential to grow at the end of 2015 going into 2016, due to the potential of 8 officers eligible to retire. If this happens, almost two thirds of the patrol division will be officers that have less than a couple of years on the job. With laws and regulations constantly changing, direct first line supervision is required to ensure we are doing things right, not wrong. For example, what arrests are mandatory and not discretionary? When do pursuits begin, when are they terminated? How are prisoners evaluated and taken care of? The list goes on. Direct first line supervision is crucial to ensure tasks are accomplished and that we are doing the right things. It also has been proven to be a key component in liability and use of force issues.

Another challenge is records management. Due to an increase in calls for service and the need for better records storage, record management has come to the forefront as a vital part of best police practices. Every interaction with an individual, every call for service, every vehicle stop, and every investigation, has to be properly documented and stored appropriately. This includes computer, video, audio, and paper records. These records are the key components that build cases, lead to arrests, and

protect our community. Copies of these records are routinely requested (FOIL-freedom of information law) by individuals and others. Technologies such as body camera's, in car computers, in car camera's, and the requirement to video and audio record all Felony arrests, place a very large demand on data storage and indexing operations. Proper storage, indexing, and retrieval of this data requires not only the appropriate equipment, but dedicated personnel.

Drug issues are another current challenge. We have seen an increase in drug possession and usage in our community. There have been over sixty overdoses year to date in our community. Five of them have resulted in deaths. These statistics are deeply troubling, and have become one of the most difficult issues our society has to deal with. On top of this is the trickle down issues that affect all parts of our community. We see many domestics, burglaries, larcenies, vehicle & traffic accidents, mental health issues that are all tied into drug usage. One individual this year recently was involved in numerous burglaries of homes, with thefts valued at over \$100, 000, to support his drug problem. Individuals such as this have had an adverse effect on members in our community and has decreased their sense of security and safety. This is but one example. Dealing with these types of individuals when encountered is challenging and dangerous. These individuals not only put a strain on our resources, but they also require services from counseling, health, and mental health agencies. This issue needs to be addressed. It is not specific to one age group and is spread out from teenagers to mature adults. To combat this issue we need to have a dual approach. We need to prevent our youth from developing these problems. We hope to address this by having a School Resource Officer (SRO) in our schools to educate our youth, develop good relationships, and reinforce appropriate behaviors. We also need to address the drug epidemic that our society has. By having a dedicated Narcotics Officer, we can begin to attack the issue, and stem the illegal use of drugs in our community.

I am extremely proud of the members of the Orchard Park Police Department for their efforts in protecting and serving our community. However, as we move forward, our society and community continue to change. Our department must evolve to deal with the new challenges, mandates, regulations, laws, and social issues that are thrust upon us. By partnering with our citizens, schools, businesses, and other law enforcement agencies, I am confident we can meet these challenges.

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