

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA - ANNUAL REPORT 1997

ACCOMPLISHMENTS & EVENTS

Public Safety

Fire Fatalities and Property Loss. During FY 1997, there were no fire fatalities in Alexandria, compared to two in FY 1996. Fires caused \$2.7 million in lost property in FY 1997, down 28% from last year.

Emergency Calls. During FY 1997, the Fire Department responded to 4,835 fire calls, a decrease of 6.1% from the previous year. There were 10,587 calls for emergency medical service, virtually the same as in FY 1996. Of these, medivac helicopters transported 28 patients to trauma centers for treatment. The Hazardous Materials Unit responded to 105 incidents.

Fire Safety Education Program. The Fire Department began the "Safety House" program for elementary school children in December 1996. The "Safety House" trailer was purchased with funds donated by Embassy Suites Hotel, and is used to teach children (pre-school through third grade) fire safety practices. During FY 1997, the Fire Marshal determined that children playing with lighters or matches started nine fires, including one resulting in injuries. During FY 1997, the Fire Department presented fire safety education programs to over 1,400 children at public and parochial elementary schools.

Professional Recognition. The Fire Department received the International Association of Fire Chiefs' Fire Service Award for Excellence for the Department's Station Management Plan. This plan decentralizes purchasing and other internal services, shifting decision-making to the fire station level. The eight stations, using a consensus process, target the hazards of the neighborhoods they serve, plan community outreach programs based on the specific needs within their service areas, and budget for the purchase of supplies.

Gas Explosion. A natural gas explosion at 802 Green



Students at Hammond Middle School show off their DARE "diplomas" after completing the year-long drug abuse resistance and education program, taught by Police Officers and Deputy Sheriffs.

Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP).

Procedural and legislative changes took place in FY 1997 that strengthened the City's response to domestic violence and offered greater protection to victims. The City's Office on Women provided court advocacy and individual counseling to 1,889 victims of domestic violence in FY 1997, and provided emergency shelter, crisis intervention, and counseling to 205 women and children who resided in the battered women's shelter. Following the March 1996 murder of Alexandria school teacher Karen Mitsoff by her former boyfriend, the City Manager created an Ad Hoc Task Force to review the case and determine if changes were needed in the City's handling of domestic assault cases, and what, if any, new legislation was necessary. As a result of the Task Force's findings, the 1997 Virginia General Assembly enacted legislation, effective July 1, that gives stalking victims the right to a protective order when a judge or magistrate issues a stalking warrant. Prior to this legislation, a protective order could only be issued upon conviction of the offender. A grant obtained by the City's Domestic Violence Intervention Project has enabled local agencies to intensify efforts to address domestic violence. The \$68,000 grant from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services is administered through the Commonwealth's

Street on July 17, 1996, demolished one home and severely damaged an adjoining townhouse. Both homes were unoccupied at the time and there were no injuries. Property damage was estimated at \$650,500. An investigation by the City Fire Marshal determined that natural gas accumulated in 802 Green Street while Washington Gas workers were performing a pressure upgrade on gas lines serving nearby homes on South Columbus Street. Unaware that 802 Green Street was served by the high pressure gas line they were working on, gas company personnel fed high pressure gas into 802 Green Street, which had not been equipped with a high pressure regulator. The State Corporation Commission received a copy of the Fire Marshal's report and levied a penalty of \$50,000 against the Washington Gas Company for two safety violations. The Fire Marshal's report was distributed to residents of the neighborhood.

Community Policing. Although the concept of Community Policing encompasses the entire Police Department, 18 Community Oriented Police (COP) Officers work in 12 communities to enforce nuisance violations, solve community problems and help improve the quality of life in City neighborhoods. In January 1997, the Department opened a Community Policing Office at Landmark Mall. In February, a COP officer was added to the Hampton Court/Armistead Street community. Other COP officers continue to focus on crime prevention in their assigned communities, including businesses along King Street and neighborhoods near lower King Street and in Parkfairfax, Mount Jefferson, Hunter's Run, Inner City, Lynhaven, and Arlandria. In addition to the 18 COP officers, the Police Department's community outreach efforts include the Residential Police Officer (RPO) program. Four of the RPOs reside in housing provided by the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (Officer Gerald Ford in the James Bland Community, Officer Donna Barnes in the Samuel Madden Community, Officer Reginald Sheffey in the Andrew Adkins Community, and Officer Belinda Callahan in Arlandria). In the City's first public/private RPO partnership, a fifth RPO, Officer William Lyle, was added in the summer of 1997 at the Hampton Court Apartments to serve the Hampton Court/Armistead

Attorney's Office. It provides for a part-time Law Clerk to assist with the preparation of all domestic violence cases for criminal prosecution and a Victim-Witness Specialist to assist victims before, during and after the judicial process. The expanded use of computer networks speeds the transfer of information between Police, the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office, and the Office on Women's Domestic Violence Program. The new network makes it possible for victims to be contacted more quickly by Domestic Violence Program staff, who offer information on court procedures, safety plans, emergency shelter and counseling. Eight mobile telephones donated by Cellular One are in continuous use by victims of high-risk domestic violence cases. In June, the DVIP issued an appeal to City employees to donate surplus personal cellular telephones and a similar appeal to the public is planned for this fall.

Sexual Assault Victim Services. The Office on Women's Sexual Assault Response and Awareness (SARA) Program responded to the needs of 331 sexual assault victims and their family members or friends in FY 1997. SARA Program volunteers contributed 5,981 hours, working with staff to provide 24-hour crisis intervention, accompanying victims through the criminal justice system, and attending 145 preliminary hearings and trials.

Police Tactical Computer System. Alexandria Police Officers are using the latest cellular technology to access information from state and federal criminal justice and motor vehicle data bases. Funded entirely by federal grants and monies seized from drug dealers, the Tactical Computer System places laptop computers in the hands of patrol officers. This system gives field officers the ability to file incident reports electronically and to both send and receive images such as finger prints and photographs. The first phase of this project was implemented in October 1996, when field police officers using any one of the 42 devices currently deployed, began directly accessing state and federal data bases for information on wanted and missing persons, drivers and vehicles, and stolen property. An additional 45 laptop computers are expected to be in use by the end of 1997. The Police Department began the project's second phase in June 1997 with the

Street community. United Dominion Realty Trust, the owner of the apartment complex, donated the Armistead Street apartment. Like COP Officers, the RPOs work within their communities to solve neighborhood problems, develop mentor programs for children, and promote crime prevention.

Crime Prevention. Serious crimes (defined by the FBI as murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and auto theft) declined by 3.7% to 7,143, the lowest number of serious crimes in 27 years. In addition, the number of violent crimes (homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) fell 2.8% in 1996 to a 29-year low. Since 1977, serious crime has declined by 21.4% despite the City's population growing by 11.1% to a high of 117,300. Aggravated assaults declined 19.6% to 266 in 1996, the lowest in eight years. Burglaries increased 1.2% from 1995 to 1996, due primarily to a higher incidence of burglaries from storage sheds and garages. The number of residential burglaries was the lowest in 32 years. Auto thefts decreased 19.9%, from 1,183 in 1995 to 947 in 1996, due primarily to prevention and investigation efforts of the Department's Auto Theft Task Force and the Crime Prevention Unit.

Arrests. Arrests of both juveniles and adults declined in calendar 1996 although drug arrests increased. Arrests for drug distribution or possession totaled 574, up 18.4% from 1995. Adult drug arrests increased 15.2% to 499 in 1996 while juvenile drug arrests increased 44.2% to 75 in 1996. The 3.2% decline in overall juvenile arrests can be attributed in part to efforts targeted at habitual juvenile offenders. One such interagency effort, the Serious Habitual Offender Comprehensive Action Program (SHOCAP), involves the Police Department, the Court Services Unit, the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office and the City Schools. Begun in 1996, SHOCAP targets the small percentage of juvenile offenders responsible for the majority of crimes committed by juveniles. The 7.3% reduction in overall arrests in 1996 is also a result of fewer alcohol-related offenses. The Alcohol Interdiction Program, for example, is credited by neighborhood groups and businesses with reducing nuisance crimes and increasing the quality of life.

successful transmission of photographs between Alexandria Tactical Computers in the field and field devices from other police agencies. The Alexandria Police Department's pioneering application of technology has been cited by officials of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children as a breakthrough in the sharing of identification information in the first critical hours of a child's disappearance.

Grand Larceny Auto Task Force. To combat auto theft in the City's West End, downtown and Arlandria, the Police Department deployed a task force of six plain clothes police officers during FY 1997. Since July 1, 1996, the Task Force has made 27 auto theft arrests and contributed significantly to the nearly 20% drop in stolen motor vehicles during calendar year 1996.

Graffiti Reporting Program. When graffiti is reported in the City, aggressive follow up by Police Officers and prompt removal have proved to be effective in reducing additional episodes in the same area. The spring of 1997 saw a dramatic 64% increase in the number of reported incidents. Most of these were the work of one person who was apprehended in June by a City Police Officer. The success of the Graffiti Reporting Program and the Police Department's aggressive anti-graffiti efforts will be further enhanced by ordinances recently passed by City Council. These ordinances will, for example, empower the City to proceed with needed graffiti removal on private property without a court order.

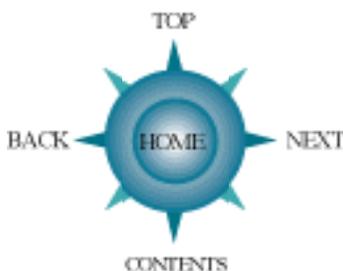
Red Light Camera Monitoring. The City will begin a pilot program to catch motorists who fail to obey red light signals at traffic intersections. Cameras will be used at selected intersections to photograph drivers as they pass through red lights. The Police Department will mail a traffic citation and a date-and-time-stamped photograph of the violation to the vehicle's owner. The program's goal is to reduce the number of accidents caused by drivers who violate red light laws.

Citizens' Police Academy. The Police Department's Citizens' Police Academy graduated four classes and a

During FY 1997, local courts ordered one new interdiction, bringing the total number of those interdicted due to multiple alcohol-related offenses to 22. It is unlawful to sell alcohol to interdicted persons and for interdicted persons to possess alcohol.

total of 67 citizens since it began in September 1995. Academy participants come from community and civic associations as well as human rights groups. They enroll in a ten-week course, taught by Police Department staff, that covers the role, functions and responsibilities of the Department. The course also provides police staff with valuable insights into how police actions are perceived by citizens.

Nuisance Abatement. The Fire Department's Code Enforcement Bureau established a hotline (703-836-0041) to enable citizens to report trash build-ups, rodent infestation, abandoned or derelict vehicles, overcrowded apartments or other unsafe conditions. Calls to the 24-hour hotline are answered seven days a week by the Fire Communications Center. Citizens who call the hotline are contacted within 24 hours and advised of the status of their complaint. Posters in Spanish and English advertise this service throughout the City. Special monitoring of stepped-up Code Enforcement and Fire Department inspection efforts began in September 1996 in five target neighborhoods: Arlandria, Hume Springs, Lynhaven, Del Ray and Mt. Vernon Avenue. Monthly reports identify problem addresses, whether the property is owner- or tenant-occupied, repeat offenders, the number and type of code violations, and the dates that the violations are cited and corrected. This information is entered into a tracking system used to monitor City staff activities in the target areas, to compile violation histories by property and property owners/occupants, and to analyze trends that result from code enforcement.



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