

The Community Report

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COMMUNITY POLICING



Rhodes College is a private liberal arts college (c. 1700 students) whose vision is to graduate students with a lifelong passion for learning, a compassion for others and the ability to translate academic study and personal concern into effective leadership and action in their communities. An integral part of this mission is Rhodes' commitment to Memphis. Currently more than 40 faculty-sponsored programs involving the community are in place, as are dozens of smaller, student-led initiatives.

The college is particularly engaged in mutually beneficial outreach and partnership activities in the neighborhoods of Hollywood, Hyde Park and Springdale. Situated just north of the campus, this predominantly African-American (98%) area has declined because of a loss of industry-based employment in the area, an aging population, out-migration and industrial pollution. Approximately 47.4% of all households are below poverty level. With support from a three-year HUD grant, the Rhodes Hollywood Springdale Partnership (RHSP) was established in October 2004 to address these issues. RHSP's overall initiatives focus on building neighborhood organizations, dealing with crime issues, cleaning up physical problems, improving community health and enhancing educational opportunities.



Residents "retake" the neighborhood, via a cleanup, following the closure of a drug retail site.

The community policing and economic development activities described below are part of the comprehensive "weed and seed" strategy developed by RHSP to promote neighborhood revitalization and capacity building. Its objective is to create sustainable networks among community stakeholders and government agencies that provide services so that neighborhood residents, business owners and churches are empowered to create positive change in their neighborhood. The goal is a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable community. Ultimately, we envision residents administering the bulk of the programs and providing the leadership for ongoing efforts.

Partners in RHSP represent a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including residents, the Midtown North Neighborhood Association, churches, business owners, schools (Cypress Middle and Springdale Elementary), local industries (e.g., Buckman Laboratories, Hershey Corporation), city and county government agencies, local nonprofits, other nearby neighborhood associations and the faculty, students and staff of Rhodes College.

Rhodes College has worked for several years to develop a presence and trust in the neighborhood. This is the foundation for the community policing partnership

and for all other projects in Hollywood-Springdale. We have used our influence in the broader community—including connections to public officials—to work *with* the neighborhood rather than simply in it.

A key RHSP strategy for dealing with crime was the establishment of the Police and Joint Agency (PJA) Committee. Under the leadership of Dr. Michael Kirby, Plough Professor of Urban Studies at Rhodes College, this committee meets monthly to analyze crime patterns, then strategize and address crime generators in the neighborhood. In the context of its "weed and seed" approach, the PJA Committee has identified the following objectives:

- Increase responsiveness of law enforcement to residents' and businesses' concerns.
- Reduce violent and drug-related crime in the neighborhood.
- Cooperate with other neighborhood groups to improve the physical and economic landscape of the neighborhood—for example, identify areas of concern and then involve whoever is needed to clean up a site, correct commercial code violations or help rehabilitate a property.

As the PJA Committee grew from its initial partnership between Rhodes and COACT (a community policing substation), we mapped a strategy to attract additional partners, including other agencies, residents and businesses. Regular participants in the PJA Committee now include Dr. Kirby and his students, Memphis Police Department (MPD) officers and commanders, the Shelby County Sheriff's Department, the Health Department, the Mayor's Citizen Service Center, the local business association, the neighborhood association, local church pastors, concerned residents and RHSP staff. Other participants in these interagency meetings include representatives from the Office of Fire Department Prevention, City of Memphis Housing Code Enforcement and Shelby County Commercial Code Enforcement. In addition, both MPD Blue Crush units and the District Attorney General's office have closed down neighborhood drug houses.

PJA Committee meetings are conducted like a seminar, with crime data presented to identify new hot spots and determine the impact of the committee's previous efforts. For the week prior to each meeting, Dr. Kirby compiles the crime

statistics from city and county databases and from windshield surveys. Rhodes faculty and students then review the collected data to discern patterns and target problems. Focusing especially on the number and location of violent crime and burglaries, we target specific addresses.

In addition to the crime data, we depend heavily on businesses and residents for an early warning system, which alerts us even before the statistics are available.

As problems and potential problems are identified, these are targeted with resources—sometimes police, sometimes code enforcement and sometimes resident action.

Participants are mutually respectful and work together to identify

responsibility, whether it is the police who need to do a better job or the residents who are not doing their fair share in crime prevention. Focusing on action rather than blame and on being proactive has increased trust among stakeholders and confidence in the potential for meaningful neighborhood revitalization. This is a source of mutual pride as the group works together toward accomplishing common goals.

This approach to community policing has enabled many agencies to come together on a monthly basis. Whereas a year ago five people might be at a PJA Committee meeting, meetings are now sometimes standing-room-only. In the context of this broad participation, each constituency listens to the others and responds accordingly, even if the message does not fit previous conceptions. The result is that a neighborhood that was once ignored now gets the attention it deserves.

The monthly meetings have also helped to develop relationships that cut through bureaucratic delays and lead to solutions. Government agencies are now seen not as faceless bureaucracies but as individuals who come with a personal commitment to help make things happen. For example, at the March meeting, one of the church representatives talked about his desire to organize a film festival for teens during the summer. Working with others in the room, he was able to arrange



Bessie Ivory (left) of Chelsea Early Start Day Care Center and Dorothy Cox, manager of the Rhodes Hollywood Springdale Partnership.

the date, place, patrolling in the area, even free refreshments, all within a few hours instead of days or weeks.

The key to the partnership's growth and effectiveness is relationship-building. In recent individual interviews, partners independently named the same key factors: openness, inclusiveness, diversity, mutual respect, cooperation and accountability. In Lt. Granderson's words, "This is about the community as a whole: neighbors, churches, businesses, the college. Everyone brings something to the table."

Steve Shuler from the Sheriff's Department talked about the "spirit of openness" of the community-government partnership and the advantages of relating to one another "on a first-name basis" so that everyone feels accountable to the others and personally involved in the neighborhood. Because the PJA Committee meets monthly in the local community policing station, agency representatives see firsthand the neighborhood they are helping. These meetings thus provide a dependable venue for residents and business owners to meet face-to-face with representatives of the agencies who can address current challenges and provide on-the-spot problem-solving.

Exemplary Activities

Specific actions taken by participants in the Police Joint Agency and Clean-up Committees illustrate how various partners work together to meet our objectives.

The strong law enforcement presence now apparent in the neighborhood has resulted in lower crime rates and far fewer complaints that police are not responsive. Coinciding with the lower crime rates and police responsiveness are reductions in loitering and drug activity.

The opening of a COACT office in the Hollywood Branch Library building in October 2006 was a major step forward in our community policing efforts. Through the concerted effort of Rhodes, community leaders, and two City Council representatives, we were able to designate, renovate, equip and open the office.

Since the establishment of this office, crime rates—including violent crimes, loitering and drug activity—have fallen in the neighborhood. The crime rate in Hollywood Springdale has also decreased at over twice the rate of the other neighborhoods in the north police precinct. When we began, a primary issue was

lack of enforcement on drug and prostitution arrests—and therefore lower-than-warranted statistics. Because of our persistence and an increase in enforcement, those figures initially rose, but they have now decreased as the perpetrators have left the area. Illustrating the kind of enforcement now happening are the “zero tolerance” enforcement initiatives undertaken by the county sheriff and several Memphis Police Department Blue Crush units on three separate occasions. On March 17-18, 2006, for example, they made 52 arrests (7 felonies and 45 misdemeanors), issued 244 traffic tickets and recovered drugs and weapons.

Based on one-week periods before each monthly meeting, total crime decreased by 55% from 2006 to 2007. Violent crime went from 36% in January 2006 to 17% in January 2007. Further, more of the crime in 2007 included larceny and other petty crime rather than the previously prevalent violent crime. Although there was a one-month increase in crime in March 2007, violent crime was only 5% of the total and burglaries another 14%, with 81% being less serious crimes.

The reduction in loitering and drug activity is apparent through a number of indicators. Perhaps most telling is the lower number of complaints the COACT unit receives. A survey of residents and businesses before the project began indicated that loitering and drug activity were among their greatest concerns. Initially, however, residents and businesses called in few complaints because they expected little or no follow-up. After they discovered that COACT would respond, they started to register complaints on a regular basis. Now, although residents and businesses do not hesitate to call when there is a problem, the number of loitering/drug complaints has significantly decreased. A recent newspaper article cites the owner of Hollywood Furniture and Hardware, who reports that the neighborhood used to be a “haven for drugs and crime,” but since “Rhodes came to town,” he has noticed increased police presence.

To illustrate, there used to be a large “open-air drug market” on a lot next to a popular convenience store. The subject of many residents’ complaints, it has now been closed down, and the gatherings no longer take place there. Although residents occasionally call about litter, they no longer report drug sales on this property. RHSP and undercover police continue to patrol and monitor the site and adjacent areas.

Statistically, we note a comparison between the crime incidents for one-week measuring periods in fall 2006 versus the crime incidents for one-week periods prior to the PJA meetings in winter 2007. In April and October 2006, respectively, 23%

and 25% of the crime indicators were drug arrests. During the first three months in 2007, there were none. The level of violent crime was low for that period as well, perhaps a residual effect of the earlier 2006 drug enforcement work.

We also have visual evidence based on what police officers, sheriff’s deputies and college faculty or students observe when patrolling or driving in the neighborhood. According to the COACT officers, the word is out that loitering will not be tolerated. When it is spotted, citizens call and law enforcement responds. The result has been a better relationship among law enforcement, residents and business owners and better rapport about this issue at public meetings. We are now planning for a follow-up

survey of residents, businesses and churches to confirm these impressions among the broader constituency.

Working with the new owner of Goodwill Villages housing project has also been productive and exemplifies the positive reputation of our community policing initiatives. He sought out Lt. Granderson, Dr. Kirby, and Ms. Cox (RHSP Project Manager) after learning of their role in the community. In order to clear the low-income housing complex of criminal activity, he met with these members of the PJA Committee to discuss the situation, develop an action plan and cooperatively implement it.



(Seated around the table clockwise from left) Rhodes student Marcus Falion; Jill Seifried, Office of Planning and Development; Melvin Travis, Hyde Park Community Development Corporation; Rhodes professor Mike Kirby; Tom Schachner, Shelby County Health Department (SCHD); Bessie Ivory, Chelsea Early Start Day Care; Lt. Richard Granderson, Memphis Police Department (MPD); Yahya Ah, business owner; Officer Kevin Baker, MPD; Tantileer Sharkey, SCHD. Back row, left to right, Rhodes students Alex Liu, Ruthanne Harlow, Dana Bartolomei and Drew Davis.

RHSP staff, police and health department supervisors regularly visit problematic businesses, particularly convenience stores, to order the removal of debris and other materials there and in adjacent vacant lots. A specific example involved working with the Commercial Anti-Neglect Unit to board up a vacant business building on Springdale Street. Now repairs are under way.

The key to identification of businesses and properties to target for clean-up and increased patrols has been community participation and active listening. Review of the crime statistics and complaints at meetings of the neighborhood association,

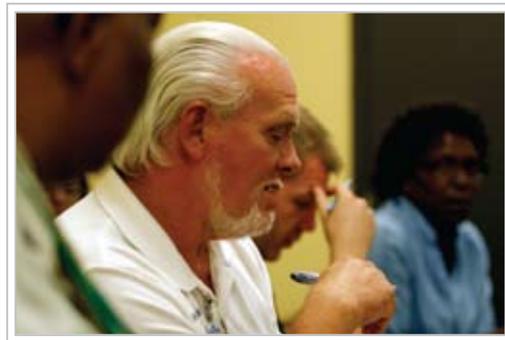
Midtown North Clean-up Committee and PJA Committee are primary sources of information. The Clean-up Committee is also conducting a door-to-door survey, dubbed “Heart to Heart,” that provides an opportunity for neighbors to voice concerns. A similar approach has been useful in commercial areas, as COACT officers and their collaborating partners periodically visit with local businesses to hear about their concerns.

When the police are patrolling, residents sometimes flag them down to discuss concerns—another indication that relationships are at the heart of our success. Finally, we have conducted land use and “windshield” surveys as police, sheriffs, college representatives and involved citizens (e.g., members of the Clean-up Committee) drive through the neighborhood. They identify lots for clean-up as well as any that have vagrants or open drug sales.

These sites are then noted and discussed at monthly PJA Committee meetings. The basic approach is to identify small problems and address them before they grow, creating an action plan to fit the specific circumstances. The simplest response is for Lt. Granderson or Officer Kevin Baker to visit the site and ask loiterers to move on or ask owners to clean up the property.

When vacant lots are involved, another strategy has been to post “No Trespassing” signs or code enforcement “Dangerous Structure Do Not Enter” signs—for example, at a county-owned lot on Springdale—and then have COACT patrol the area. If people are there illegally, they are ticketed and/or arrested. When code violations are involved, the committee (which includes city and county code enforcement personnel) works with the appropriate agency to (1) get owners to address concerns, (2) board up vacant structures or (3) demolish condemned ones. The process used to close down the drug houses is described below:

The police department’s organized crime unit, working in partnership with Housing Code Enforcement and the District Attorney General’s



(Left to right) Charles Williams, Buckman Industries; Richard McClellan, City of Memphis housing code inspector; James Carmichael, owner, Goodwill Apartments; Patricia Arnold, staff member, Goodwill Village Apartments.

office, filed nuisance charges and then closed down five drug houses. This nuisance-charges approach, based on residents’ tips, appears to be a workable strategy for dealing with drug houses. Although some of the houses are still shuttered, one (on Shasta Street, near the RHSP community office) is now a productive residence.

The key to closing the drug houses was networking. The basic strategy was to use nuisance charges filed with MPD’s organized crime unit, which in turn worked with Housing Code Enforcement and the District Attorney General’s office. In each case, we began this lengthy, cooperative process by complaining about specific sites to Lt. Granderson, who noted them in a memo sent to the MPD’s drug task force. To maintain pressure, we continued talking about the sites at each meeting and initiated a campaign to encourage residents to call in to the anonymous drug hotlines. We facilitated this process by creating and distributing a brochure containing the numbers to call. In addition, committee members lobbied the district attorney general and police director at public events and generally raised the visibility of the problem. In some instances we used public relations connections to air interviews with residents about the problem houses on local television stations. Throughout this period, the police gathered evidence that the properties were a nuisance to the neighborhood. As a result, the DA’s office moved to take over the properties.

Residential and commercial litter has been reduced by 60% through the cooperative efforts of RHSP clean-up events, often developed jointly by the HHPSNA Clean-up and PJA Committees.

In parallel with the PJA Committee, the neighborhood association Clean-up Committee meets monthly to plot strategy and tactics for dealing with physical conditions. Averaging 10-15 attendees per meeting, the committee includes about 25 residents, businesses and churches. In addition, a RHSP staff member has led efforts to clean the commercial corridors along Hollywood, Springdale, and Chelsea streets. She and other staff members have worked with the health department to contact problem business owners, resulting in improved conditions. Lt. Granderson of the COACT unit calls clean-up efforts “a deterrent to crime,” and has seen these efforts discourage further littering, debris creation, violent crime and drug sales at the targeted sites.

In addition to the commercial areas noted above, churches and Rhodes College fraternities have worked with residents to target vacant lots and problem areas in residential areas. A team of residents and store owners also regularly helps empty the trash barrels (provided to RHSP by the Hershey Corporation) that are placed strategically around the neighborhood.

On a related front, we have developed a more efficient process for dealing with dilapidated houses in the neighborhood. The 14 worst houses were identified and put forth as a priority for demolition and removal in a meeting between area church leaders and City Council members on March 10, 2006. Less than a year later, 12 of the 14 houses have been demolished. This represents a considerable decrease in the typical demolition process timeframe. With the participation of code enforcement agencies in the monthly PJA Committee meetings, responsiveness continues to increase.

Examples of Economic Outcomes

The collaborative's basic assumption is that improving the physical environment and reducing crime are key to economic development. Businesses might stay in an area if they are already there. Unless they perceive the neighborhood as clean and safe, however, they will not thrive and expand, nor will new ones be established. As with all aspects of the partnership, the key to economic development has been relationship building. Several specific examples help illustrate this point:

- When RHSP learned that a local beauty shop owner was wondering whether to remain in the neighborhood because loiterers in the building next door were damaging her business, Dr. Kirby introduced her to Lt. Granderson. They worked out a



(Seated around the table clockwise from left) Lt. Granderson; Mr. Ah; Officer Baker; Memphis City Council member Barbara Swearingen Ware; Ms. Sharkey; Steve Shular, Shelby County Sheriff's Department; Mr. Falion; Mr. Travis, Professor Kirby, Mr. Schachner. (Back row from left) Marilyn Caulay, Children's Services; Maggie Bolden, resident; Midtown North Community Association member Brian Knight; Tracy Rowe of Stonewall Block Club; Ben Beaird, Vollintine Evergreen Community Association.

plan to address the loitering problem. Now her business is going well and she is exploring options for opening a laundromat. Further, with support from the PJA Committee, she organized the merchants on Springdale Street when they were the target of a crime wave, helping to alleviate fears and work with COACT to restore order. These business owners subsequently organized a business association, an organization to which Rhodes provides support, as they develop capacity to expand and enhance their plans to nurture business growth in the neighborhood.

- The owner of Hollywood Furniture and Hardware says that he no longer has loiterers in front of his store. He also reports his "best three months ever" and has bought the adjoining building to expand his business. He credits Rhodes with setting a good example by supporting neighborhood businesses. "They support the community by doing business with us and not on the other side of town. It makes me more interested in long-term effects."
- Similarly, the Vaughn Furniture store on Hollywood Street has recently built an annex to accommodate inventory for the growing business.
- Several low-income apartment complexes have sought out the PJA Committee as part of their efforts to turn around crime-infested housing. For example, A New Beginning is a nonprofit organization formed by a local church. Rev. Booker, the church's pastor, has worked with PJA to clear out crime generators and is now working with Rhodes students to renovate rundown units in the complex.
- Similarly, a new investor at Village Apartments, another low-income housing complex, sought COACT and RHSP as he set out to clear up crime in the area. This growing relationship has also helped the Memphis newcomer to identify potential sources for financing as he seeks to rehabilitate the property.
- COACT and RHSP have recently worked with Springdale Elementary and City of Memphis traffic engineers to obtain a commitment for new sidewalks, painted crosswalks, and pedestrian signage along Hollywood Street. We attracted the city's attention by appealing to the need for children's safe passage to school, but the resulting infrastructure investment will help pedestrians of all ages as well as businesses in the area.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most important outcome of all is the change in residents' attitudes about their capacity to make a difference. On a recent television spot, one resident stated, "This is really a positive effort. At first we didn't trust the police and didn't think anyone was concerned about us. By Rhodes College backing this [community policing] effort and everyone in the city participating, officials are coming out and letting us know that they will help us." Ultimately, says RHSP Project Manager Dorothy Cox, the grassroots strategy, with residents "watching each other's backs," creates a sense of community and pride as residents realize that "we're all in this together."

What makes this college-based community policing partnership unique is our ability to bring together so many public agencies to work directly with concerned residents at the grassroots level. The college has demonstrated its willingness to be out in the field improving crime conditions rather than only talking about how bad crime is. The keys are relationships and networking. People know us in the neighborhood. They stop us on the street or in stores and seek our help. They know Rhodes is there for the long term and not just until the end of a grant. And they know that Rhodes can help make things happen in their neighborhood if we are all willing to work toward positive change. Three other neighborhood groups have asked us to help them develop a similar program in their neighborhoods.

Dr. Michael P. Kirby
Plough Professor of Urban Studies
Rhodes College, Buckman Hall 215
2000 North Parkway, Memphis, TN 38112
901-843-3841, mkirby@rhodes.edu

The Community Report, made possible by funding from the Plough Foundation and Rhodes College, seeks to provide information and connectivity to Memphis-area groups—residents, neighborhood organizations, churches, businesses, and government and nonprofit agencies—involved in reclaiming neglected neighborhoods from the ground up. We further seek to build a broader interest in achieving these goals by collaborating with community groups and liberal arts colleges on a national level.



Rhodes College

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