



SANTA CRUZ POLICE DEPARTMENT
155 Center Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060

MEDIA RELEASE



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TOPIC: SCPD Community-Oriented Policing Provides Transparency, Accountability

INFORMATION:

Santa Cruz Police Department's Community-Oriented Policing Provides Transparency, Accountability

SANTA CRUZ, CA — The nation and the Santa Cruz community are going through a historic and needed process of examining the relationship between police officers and those they serve and protect. Events at both the national and local levels continue to drive the discussion.

The Santa Cruz Police Department (SCPD) aims to help move the discussion forward by re-emphasizing the benefits of community-oriented policing, a proven strategy that focuses on building trust and strengthening the relationship between police officers and community members.

Establishing a culture of transparency and accountability between peace officers and the community they serve is the guiding principle of community-oriented policing (COP). This helps ensure decision making is understood and follows policy.

“In the end, our overarching goal is communication and public trust,” said Deputy Police Chief Rick Martinez.

The annual Neighborhood Block Parties program is one of the most visible activities SCPD does as part of its community-oriented policing program. SCPD worked with Santa Cruz Neighbors to develop and launch the annual program. The event has grown to 48 organized neighborhood gatherings in 2016 promoting community safety, getting to know your neighbors and access to city staff including police officers, firefighters and city management.

SCPD programs extend well beyond Neighborhood Block Parties. For nearly two decades, SCPD has invited community members into the department for the Citizens Police Academy, an inside look at local law enforcement through lectures, demonstrations and discussion.

Dr. William Christie, a dentist in Santa Cruz, was in the first Academy class in 1998.

“It was enlightening,” Christie said. “It’s a nice introduction to law enforcement. It kind of takes down the mystery of law enforcement.”

The 11-week program, offered in both English or Spanish, covers patrol, traffic, police investigations, gang culture, narcotics, use of force and arrest tactics, the court system and more. Over 640 community members have graduated from the Academy since it began.

Christie recalled community members who entered the program with a negative attitude toward law enforcement but who left with an understanding and respect of the complexities of the role.

“That’s what it’s about, letting the public see there is not a blue curtain,” Christie said.

The academy also has helped officers. Christie recalled an early class where an officer described going “code 3 to a 211” for several minutes before a student interrupted to ask what the police jargon meant — driving fast with lights and sirens on to a report of a robbery. For future talks, officers did more to explain topics in laypeople terms. A community’s willingness to cooperate with law enforcement is born out of the level of trust, respect and support they have for their police.

“It pulls down barriers between the public and the police, and opens channels of communication,” Christie said. “It helps the public to know what resources are available to them.”

SCPD was the first law enforcement agency in Santa Cruz County to have civilian oversight, beginning with the Citizen Police Review Board (CPRB) in the early 1990s. That committee evolved into the Independent Police Auditor model of civilian oversight, handled by attorney Robert Aaronson.

Unlike the CPRB, Aaronson has full access to the department’s internal affairs (IA) investigations, including personnel files. His background in law enforcement — Aaronson has spent his entire professional career as a lawyer and currently is the Independent Police Auditor at two other Northern California police departments — also helps him understand the subject matter.

“I bring a level of experience and expertise,” he said.

Aaronson audits the IA investigations monthly, spending two days reading files, listening to audio recordings and watching videos. He writes reports on all major IA investigations — about seven or eight annually — and makes recommendations. Aaronson’s suggestions range from how the investigations should be conducted to training issues that need to be addressed.

“My number one goal is to help Santa Cruz Police improve its service to the community,” Aaronson said. “What I do is help people be more effective in their roles”

Additional civilian oversight of SCPD occurs in two ways:

- The City Council appoints three members to the Public Safety Sub-Committee.
- The City’s Commission for the Prevention of Violence Against Women provides comments on police response, policy, procedures and investigation of crimes against women with an emphasis on domestic violence and sexual assault.

Citizens also are involved in promoting officers to supervisory and management positions at SCPD. Police officers who have put in for promotions give presentations to a panel of community members and answer questions posed by the panel. Panel members score each candidate and police commanders take the panel’s feedback into account when making promotions.

SCPD’s accountability manifests in other areas as well. The department issued its first annual report in 2015, and dozens of community members volunteer in various roles at SCPD.

David Salinas, a 21-year-old from Capitola, became an SCPD volunteer after participating in the Teen Public Safety Academy when he was a junior at Soquel High School.

“It really inspired me,” said Salinas, who has wanted to be a police officer as long as he can remember.

Salinas became a mentor in the department’s PRIDE program, completed the Citizens Police Academy and, in January 2015, started volunteering in the records department at SCPD, taking records from police headquarters to the courthouse, city hall and District Attorney’s Office. The volunteer position led to a part time job — Professional Technical Assistant —that utilizes his bilingual skills.

The exposure to police work has helped Salinas as he navigates toward a career.

“Doing all that stuff really opened my eyes,” he said. “Being in these programs, you build connections with these officers. I didn’t understand the kind of stress they went through.”

Salinas is applying to universities, where he plans to study sociology before applying to become an SCPD officer. He’s also starting his third session as a PRIDE mentor this month.

“There are so many different perspectives of our criminal justice system,” Salinas said. “If you go on a ride-along or join the academy, you’ll get a better idea of what these officers are going through.”

The role of the police officer is to do more than just enforce the law and arrest those that break it. Building connections with residents and business owners is a key part of local law enforcement.

Ride-alongs are one of SCPD’s most utilized community programs. Citizens get real-time insight into how situations are handled and what police work looks like in Santa Cruz. There were 154 ride-alongs in 2015. Through the end of October, there have been 174 ride-alongs this year.

“When people trust law enforcement and they participate in making their community safer, we’re more successful, we’re solving cases,” Martinez said. “We can’t do it alone.”

For more information about SCPD’s community programs and to get involved, visit www.santacruzpolice.com.

ABOUT SCPD

The Santa Cruz Police Department (SCPD) is committed to working in partnership with the community to enhance public safety, prevent crime, enforce laws and protect the rights of all people through innovative problem-solving approaches. A progressive, professional organization, SCPD officers are dedicated to conducting themselves with the highest ethical standards and the department is accountable to the community. SCPD has 94 sworn officers and 29 civilian staff to protect and serve Santa Cruz’s 64,000 residents and millions of annual visitors. Learn more at www.santacruzpolice.com, <http://santacruzpolice.blogspot.com>, or via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Pinterst.

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For additional information, contact: Joyce Blaschke

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Anonymous tips can also be sent to the police department through our Tip Line (831) 420-5995, or from our Website; www.santacruzpolice.com. Tipsters can also submit an anonymous tip via our smartphone app or from an SMS text. Visit our Website for instructions.