

Organization Snapshot

Leesburg Citizens Support Team

Year Started: 1996

Number of Members: 19

Town Population: 33,500

Website:

www.nacop.org/leesburg

Provide an overview of your community, where the C.O.P. group operates.

The Town of Leesburg, Virginia, was established in 1758 and has grown to the current population of 33,500. It's currently some 12 square miles in size and is the county seat of Loudoun County Virginia, which continues to be one of the top three fastest growing areas in the United States.

Who started the C.O.P organization and why?

Our organization was founded in 1996 by a forward looking Chief of Police who recognized the need to engage the citizens of the community in a closer relationship with the Police Department. Our goal was to maintain the quality of life we had in our community in view of the changes occurring so quickly around us due to our rapid population growth.

How many people were initially involved and what did the organization look like then?

Initially a 12 week Community Oriented Police School was presented by the Police Department. At the conclusion of this COPS class, a Citizens Support Team was organized by 14 of the graduates. Our initial mission was to assist the department with administrative tasks as well as Citizens on Patrol using cell phones to alert the Police Department to observed or suspicious events.

What were your initial goals, crime reduction only, assist law enforcement with traffic, etc.

During the first year, we focused on neighborhood patrol as the primary function of our organization. We also undertook a fingerprinting program which we offered free to parents at business open houses, school functions and anywhere else we were invited to appear. We developed a booklet for the

In December, 2003, I had the pleasure of meeting with members of the Leesburg, Virginia, Citizen Support Team and Leesburg Police Chief Joseph Price at their headquarters to develop a profile on the Leesburg Police Citizen Support Team. The town of Leesburg is one of the fastest growing areas in the nation and after spending the afternoon with them, I can see why. If you'd like to live in a safe and friendly town where people care, Leesburg is for you! *By Arthur Femister*



Pictured above: Members of the Leesburg, Virginia, Citizen Support Team

parents incorporating both the fingerprints, tips on child safety and a medical release form that could be used in the event of a medical emergency while the children would be in the care of someone other than the parents.

What types of challenges did you face initially and what are they now if any?

Our early challenges were focused on the development of our program. Within the first year we became incorporated within the State of Virginia and registered with the Internal Revenue Service as a 501C3 organization. Along with this we adopted our Corporate By-Laws defining our structure as well as our relationship with the Police Department. The next challenge was creation of our Standard Operating Procedures defining everything from a code of conduct to the use of our equipment in the many applications we were developing.

If you have patrol cars, what was your first patrol car, (make, model, condition, etc.)

As our organization established itself with the Police Department and the Town Government, two about to be retired Chevrolet Caprice

police cruisers were donated. These were reconfigured as Community Patrol vehicles with yellow bar lights in place of the blue. Our department's vehicles are all white with blues markings. We painted ours gold with white markings identifying them as Community Patrol vehicles.

What does your Citizen Patrol car fleet look like now, how many cars, what type, etc.

We're currently using the two marked vehicles on neighborhood patrol as well as members personal vehicles when on patrol in a less visible mode.

What type of uniforms do you have? Polo shirts? Sheriffs uniforms? Combination?

Our uniforms consist of navy blue trousers with a white shirt which has black pocket flaps and epaulets. Our shoulder patches were custom made from our team emblem. Our head gear is a white baseball style cap with 'Support Team' embroidered on the front. We also issue a military black cloth belt with a black military style buckle and issue winter coats with our patch on both shoulders.

How many Citizen Patrol volunteers do you actively have now?

At this time our membership stands at 19 members with several applications pending.

What type of equipment do your members carry? Flashlights? Cuffs? Pepper Spray? etc.

A list of our equipment would contain road flares, a whistle for traffic control, a flashlight with traffic wand, a traffic vest and a complete uniform including rain gear. Those members spending most of their time in Leesburg as opposed to work sites away from town are issued MetroCall Pagers so they can be contacted by either the Police Department or our local Fire and Rescue Services. All members are also issued a 400mhz police portable radio which is monitored by our dispatchers. Our team also has six 800mhz radios assigned to us which are used on a sign out basis and shared for patrol. These are used with the current police network and enable us to communicate directly on the active police channel with the patrol units as well as the dispatcher.

Where is your Citizen Patrol office located? At the police station? Separate office? No office?

Our Citizens Support Team has an office assigned for our use located within our Police Headquarters. All of our members have electronic pass keys granting us access to Headquarters as well as our office.

How do you communicate between cars, volunteers and Law Enforcement? Cell phones, radios?

Communications between Team members take place using cell phones, which most members have, or the 400mhz radios which are used for coordination of team efforts at major events such as crowd control and along parade routes. Other events requiring our coordination by Dispatch are performed using the 800mhz radios.

How do you dispatch Citizen Patrol volunteers to accident scenes or calls for LE assistance?

Our team call out procedures are initiated

by notification of a need made by the Police Dispatcher notifying one of our officers. The individual receiving the request then uses a call out notification form to contact those members needed to meet the requirements of the Police Department.

What type of initial training do Citizen Patrol volunteers get and is there any ongoing training?

Members are trained upon acceptance by older members in patrol related areas such as communications and our purpose as defined by our SOP's. Some training is performed by the Police Department to State certify our members in areas such as traffic control. Ongoing training is offered to all members either as a follow up to our scheduled meetings or as a standalone training session on a weekend. The Police Department also conducts COPS classes periodically which our members are required to attend either as basic training or as a refresher.



Pictured above: Members of the Leesburg Citizen Support Team next to their patrol car in front of the Leesburg Police Station.

Do you offer any Special Services to the public or LE such as fingerprinting, vacation checks, traffic control, crime scene control, stolen car checks, etc?

Our service to the community is basically divided into two categories. The first is direct support to the community in the form of neighborhood patrols offering assistance to motorists, pedestrians and homeowners. One of our most popular programs began as child identification in the form of fingerprinting for the parents. We've evolved into providing DNA identification in place of the fingerprints. We've had much greater success with the DNA

collection considering we've been able to collect samples from sleeping infants without waking them up. The additional benefit of one DNA sample lasting 80+ years as opposed to fingerprints which we recommended redoing as the child grew also appealed to the parents.

We also have personnel on patrol at our local high school sporting events. The second category of support is to the Police Department and takes on a more complex numbers of chores. We're routinely called out for searches for lost individuals and assistance with traffic control at accident scenes, to assist with traffic at fire scenes and assist the Police when events become extended. These extended situations have included site security at plane crashes, standing by an open business while the owner responds to secure the business and observing a suspect vehicle or residence waiting for a suspect to show up. We also perform traffic control during storm power outages when the street lights go out. Other scheduled events include crowd control at Town events drawing thousands of participants and crowd control at parades and other civic events throughout the year. We also assist the Department with administrative matters when requested.

What are the qualifications to become a Citizen Patrol member and what type of background check do applicants go through?

Our members are recruited from the community at large. Our requirements are that they be over 21 years old and hold a valid drivers license. All applicants must submit a driving record report, provide information for a background check and be fingerprinted for a criminal check.

What were your most current year's statistics such as amount of miles patrolled, total hours volunteered by all members, drop in crime rate due to C.O.P., specific crimes stopped in progress or caught?

This past year our reported volunteer hours are down from the previous two years average of 9,500 hours to 8,011.5 hours. During the past year we've participated in approximately 160 incidents or events. These include scheduled events like traffic control along parade or marathon routes, crowd control at major community events such as concerts or 4th of July celebrations, assistance at public

school sports events as well as unscheduled events like security at plane crash sites, searches for missing persons, DUI reports resulting in arrests and fights resulting in arrests even though the combatants had broken up at the sounds of the sirens approaching. Our observer was able to identify the initiator for the arriving officers. Closer inspection revealed outstanding warrants on the individual.

Our acceptance within the Police Department is reflected in the attitude expressed toward us by our Departmental Command Staff. We enjoy an excellent relationship with the Department. The trust and confidence in our abilities are evidenced by the officers on the street in their willingness to ask for our assistance in the performance of their duties. The community has also expressed appreciation for our efforts to our personnel either directly or through recognition awards presented by both our Town and County Governments, Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, the national Points of Lights Foundation and the Department of Justice Volunteers in Police Service web site.

If you could wave a "magic wand" and get whatever you wanted for your Citizen Patrol group, what one thing would you ask for? (Tough question but an interesting one)

The one thing we could use the most would be the issuance of the operational 800mhz portable radio to each team member. Prior to the conversion of our police radio system from 400mhz to 800mhz, each member was issued and carried a 400mhz portable radio on the active dispatch frequency when out and about in the community. This enabled all members to be aware of police activity within the Town at all times. It provided the Department with the seamless addition of eyes and ears throughout the community during the initial minutes of incidents. The result was numerous 'catches' due to our members sighting and reporting subjects fleeing from the scenes of various incidents. Because of the cost of procuring an additional 15 radios, we make do by sharing the 6 new 800mhz we currently have assigned to us. As a result of this policy, we no longer have radios with us unless on an active patrol. We have a need for an additional twelve 800mhz radios.

What are the most common issues/problems

you face (if you wish to discuss this)?

The most common problem our organization faces deal with the leadership's ability to maintain the interest and participation of our members.

What is your annual operating budget in dollars, assuming you have one?

We have an annual budget of \$5,000 which is provided within the Town of Leesburg's budget. The Police Department also supports us with surplus uniform items and equipment as it becomes available. In addition, we receive donations, usually in the form of cash, from the community at large to supplement our budget.



What special events do you provide support for such as High School football games, Fairs, Graduations, traffic control for Marathon's and clean up days, etc?

Our support for events throughout the community include uniformed presence at the athletic events at our two local high schools, traffic control for the many benefit races and marathons, crowd control and traffic control at Civil War Reenactments held in our area, crowd control and traffic control at our events like the 4th of July, Christmas Parades, and high school homecoming parades. We maintain an information booth with our host department at safety fairs and other public affairs events. We also maintain a uniformed presence at our local concert series held in the town square every weekend throughout the summer. We assist with DUI Checkpoints and in conducting surveys for the department. We conducted a seat belt survey both before and after an enforcement period to gauge the effectiveness of the effort. Another survey was conducted on designated intersections to determine problem intersections due to individuals running red lights. We also conduct radar speed surveys on designated streets. We patrol, on request,

at events such as the Leesburg Flower and Garden Show, August Court Days Fair and other occasions involving street closures in the downtown area. We maintain a booth upon request by civic organizations, businesses, schools both public and private, and anyone else to conduct DNA identification for all attendees. Over the past two years that we've offered DNA identification to parents, we've typed approximately 1,500 children in our community.

Has any Citizen Patrol member ever been injured while performing their duties?

Due to our policy of non-engagement in police matters, we have never incurred an injury in the line of duty. Our mandate is to observe and report. In that capacity, we've been asked to maintain stakeouts but when the subject is sighted the officers take over and we withdraw. In the event of a crime drawing officers from other sectors, we fall back to maintain a presence in the areas vacated. The only incident in our six year history in which a threatening confrontation took place was a late night patrol when several subjects armed with baseball bats approached one of our patrolling members. A quick call on the portable brought an instantaneous response from several marked units resulting in profuse apologies from the subjects in question and a stern warning from the officers.

How do you motivate, recognize and reward your Citizen Patrol Volunteers?

Motivation is a difficult issue within any volunteer group. One method that works for us is to keep members engaged in productive efforts such as surveys, events and patrol. It's also important to get to know the patrol officers to increase their comfort level in the services available to them from our members. Awards and recognition come from various sources. We've been recognized as the Volunteer Team of the Year by our local County Government. We've had one of our members recognized as Senior Volunteer of the Year. We've received numerous awards from our local Town Government for outstanding service to the community. We've also received awards from our Police Department.

Most recently, the Department issued several of our members Commander Awards previously only granted to members within the Department for our efforts in locating an elderly patient who had wandered away from a local nursing home in a life threatening situation.

Our organization has also been recognized by the national Points of Light Foundation and is recognized on their web site of www.pointsoflight.org/awards/AwardWinnerShow.cfm?AwardNum=1271.

In addition, we've been recognized by the Volunteers In Police Service www.policevolunteers.org/programs/index.cfm?fuseaction=dis_pro_detail&id=625



Pictured above: Citizen Support Team Volunteer Member, John Mallery, stands watch over a school yard during the "DC Sniper" shootings in October, 2003.

Most Significant Event

Our Team has been effective in many areas including reporting drunk drivers, spotting fugitives resulting in their capture and finding injured and missing persons, but the most noteworthy event we participated in over the past year was assisting the Police Department in maintaining a uniform presence at our schools during the sniper incident last October. After the snipers made the threat against our children, our department placed personnel visibly in front of each of our schools. For the duration of the event until the snipers were captured we joined the police morning and afternoon at our assigned schools during drop off and pick up times. During these assignments we reported suspicious vehicles parking within sight of our posts while other patrol units cruised the neighborhoods and helicopters circled overhead. This event was the only time since the formation of our Leesburg Police Citizens Support Team that we intentionally put our people at risk. It was with a great sense of relief that we received word that the snipers had been apprehended some 30 miles north of our community.