

Organization Snapshot

Clearwater Citizens Patrol

Year Started: 1998

Number of Members: 76

City Population: 110,000

Website:

www.clearwaterpolice.org/volunteer

Provide an overview of your community, where the C.O.P. group operates (population, size, etc)

The city of Clearwater is approximately 25.3 square miles with a population of about 110,000 permanent residents not counting our tourist population. We have a large beach area along with the mainland.

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

The Chief started the program by having his personnel organize it and recruit the volunteers. He wanted to have more enforcement with the handicap parking and the beach community wanted more police. Unable to give them more police, he started the volunteer program in 1998.

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

There were approximately ten volunteers, three handicap parking enforcement volunteers and seven Sand Key beach volunteers.

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

Initially, they were looking at extra security and traffic enforcement with the handicap parking.

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

I took over the program in 2000 and was challenged with starting all over, making policy, learning how other agencies ran their programs, obtaining volunteers, interviewing them, placing them in positions of need around the department, starting new functions, i.e., Park Patrol, training the volunteers, background checks, uniforms, vehicles, budget, just everything.

A discussion with Officer Carol Schmidt, Volunteer Patrol Coordinator for the Clearwater Police Department. *By Arthur Femister*



Pictured above; Members of the Clearwater Police Volunteer Patrol gather around their "Off Road" vehicles used to patrol the beaches and parks.

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

Before I was involved, the volunteers used their own vehicles. When I took over, the first vehicle was a brand new Silverado pickup truck.

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

We have five vehicles. A mini van and four small pickup trucks. The Silverado went to another department.

What type of uniforms do you have? Polo shirts? Sheriff's uniforms? Combination?



October 22, 2004, President Bush meets with Clearwater Police Volunteer Chip Collins

We wear the same uniforms as the officers, only white shirts instead of dark blue. The volunteers can wear long or short pants with the short sleeved shirts. The dress (Class "A") uniform is a long sleeved shirt, tie, and long pants. Our Trail Patrol wears the polo shirts.

How many Citizen Patrol volunteers do you actively have now?

We have 76 Volunteers at this time.

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

The volunteers that are traffic trained have flash lights, traffic vests and whistles.

Where is your Citizen Patrol office located?

Our office is located at the Main Police Station

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

All the volunteers are on the same radio system as the officers. They are given their own call number and go through dispatch.

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

Dispatch will call them on the radio. They have radios that they carry and also one in the vehicle.

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

All volunteers go through a basic training in the evenings for a week. After that they will have specialized training depending on where they want to volunteer, i.e. Beach Patrol requires training with the ATV, Trail Patrol requires training with the bicycle.

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?

Yes, our volunteers go to special events and fingerprint children, install child seats, operate a robotronic bear and teach about seat belts. Our Park Patrols are trained for traffic control and our Quick Response Team (QRT) can be called out 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for situations that require personnel at a scene for an extended time, i.e., Traffic Fatality Accidents, Crime scenes, etc.

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

Our volunteers must be at least 21 years of age, never been arrested for a felony, and willing to commit to the program. We do Criminal History, Fingerprints/FBI, Sexual Predator, Drivers License, Warrants and Local checks.



Pictured above, Clearwater Police Volunteers assist Officers by securing a crime scene

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?

For the year 2003, we logged 12,789 hours, three in progress crimes and caught a suspect.

What is your number one ongoing challenge, assuming you have one?

I feel my biggest challenge is that I do not have enough time in the day to accomplish all that I would like to.

How do you recruit new members and what is your average turn over of members?

We receive most our members through citizen police academies and by word of mouth. Turn over rate is low. I have averaged 76 members for the last year and a half.

How do you rate the overall acceptance of your C.P. group with the public and LE department?

It was difficult in the beginning. The public did not know who they were and the officers did not want them around. After the volunteers had an opportunity to show what they can do, both the public and the officers were more accepting. Now the officers are on the radio asking for volunteers!

If you could wave a "magic wand" and get whatever you wanted for your Citizen Patrol group, what one thing would you ask for?

More recognition and respect throughout the community for the volunteers.

What are the most common issues/problems you face (if you wish to discuss this)?

As we are growing larger, common issues are the budget, vehicles and personnel.

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

Our annual operating budget is approximately \$25,000



Pictured above, Clearwater Police Volunteers on Bike Patrol assisting a resident.

What special events do you provide support for such as High School football games, Fairs, Graduations, traffic control, etc?

Wherever we can assist, our Volunteers are willing to help in any way we can.

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

Yes, we had one volunteer tip the ATV over and another volunteer stayed out in the heat too long. Both recovered and continue to volunteer their time.

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

I think our positive agency attitude helps a lot, in addition to letting them pick different functions they want to participate in. We provide them "give aways" from local conventions that they volunteer for, etc. Once a year we have a recognition luncheon and each person receives a gift for volunteering.

Most Significant Event

Our Volunteers are so valued in so many different ways it is hard to pick just one event that would be considered the "Most Significant Event". They have been involved in catching criminals in the act and reporting them to Officers for arrest, identifying DUI's and what we don't see is due in part to the fact that crime is deterred by the presence of the volunteer patrols.