

Organization Snapshot

Year Started: 1990
Number of Members: 135
City Population: 85,000
Website: www.nacop.org/morongo
Coordinator: CSO Arden Wiltshire

A discussion with Community Services Officer, Arden Wiltshire, Morongo Basin Citizen Patrol Coordinator, San Bernardino Sheriff's Dept.

The Morongo Basin Station is the third largest Sheriff's Station, in square miles as well as for calls for law enforcement services within the county of San Bernardino. The station services an area of approximately 5,200 square miles with a population in excess of 85,000 citizens. Within the station's area of responsibility are the incorporated communities of Yucca Valley and Twentynine Palms as well as the unincorporated communities of

Morongo Valley, Landers, Johnson Valley, Joshua Tree, Wonder Valley, Pioneertown, Amboy/Cadiz, and Flamingo Heights. To support the multiple stations with Citizens Patrol volunteers, they broke them up into seven separate groups covering the above locations.

Over two million tourists visit the Morongo Basin annually from virtually every country in the world. This influx of travelers is a direct result of having the Joshua Tree National Park, one of the nations largest national parks, as a neighbor. Another major attraction for the Morongo Basin is the world's largest United States Marine Corps base, located at the city boundary of Twentynine Palms.

The Citizen Patrol groups were started by Deputy Jerry Bucklin, the station's Community Services Officer, who recognized the need for citizen involvement in crime prevention. Borrowing the concept from Sheriff's Headquarters in San Bernardino, he began recruiting for volunteers to assist patrol deputies by being the "eyes and ears" of the community.



Citizen Patrol assists with the Morongo Basin Business Watch Program

The following is a brief description of each one of the seven groups in service today:

Twentynine Palms Citizen Patrol

The city of Twentynine Palms is known as the City of Murals with over sixteen murals painted on the wall of various businesses. People come from all over to see

these murals. The Twentynine Palms Citizen Patrol was the first citizen patrol unit at the Morongo Basin Station, with the first academy graduating in June of 1990. There are still seven original members with the unit. The Board Officers for Twentynine Palms are: Commander, Bud Calvert; Vice Commander, Madonna

Most Significant Event

"There is not any one event that stands out," says Officer Wiltshire. "It seems the Citizen Patrols consistently show their value in the little things and ways. They are great at finding open doors at businesses during routine checks and at residences during vacation checks. The majority of missing persons involving either Alzheimers victims or very small children are found by citizen patrol members."

National Association Citizens On Patrol

Be Seen ★ Be Heard ★ Make A Difference

Sherman; Secretary/Treasurer, Pat Heumann.

Cadiz / Amboy Citizen Patrol

Home to approximately 20 residents, Amboy and Cadiz provide a desert environment unlike any other. Located approximately 75 miles northeast of Twentynine Palms, Amboy is a small community that provides a rest stop with services for desert

Commander, Scott Edward;; Secretary/Treasurer, Ariel Ramirez.

Morongo Basin Citizen Equestrian Patrol

The Morongo Basin Citizen Equestrian Patrol was formed in May, 1996, for the small community of Pioneertown, which was the only area in the Morongo Basin that didn't have

Basin Citizen Equestrian Patrol expanded their patrol area to include portions of Yucca Valley that contained hiking and riding trails. Between January and December, 2000, the equestrian patrol contributed over 3,000 hours to both communities. Board Officers for the year 2001 are: Commander, Milissa Anderson; Vice Commander, Zane Neve; Secretary /

A Morongo Basin Equestrian Patrol conducting a vacation check in Pioneertown, a rural community.



travelers. Cadiz is home to Cadiz Land Company, one of the largest agricultural developments in the high desert. During harvest season, the ranch is home to over 250 workers!

The Cadiz Citizen Patrol provides valuable pro-active patrol to travelers on the National Trails Highway (also known as Old Route 66) and Kelbaker Road, a 20-mile stretch of pavement south of Interstate 40. These two routes are popular for travelers visiting Las Vegas, Laughlin and the Colorado River. Board Officers for the year 2001 are: Commander, Leslie Thornburg; Vice

a citizen patrol unit. Since the county wasn't able to provide a patrol vehicle for this new group, it was decided to use an asset already in place, horses. Pioneertown was built in 1946 by cowboy legend Roy Rogers and fellow investors. They built a replica of an old western town and envisioned sharing the charm of this majestic area. The setting is absolutely breathtaking with most of the original buildings still standing! Every Sunday afternoon during summer months, visitors are treated to an old-fashioned western gunfight!

By fall of 1997 the Morongo

Treasurer, John Wilson.

Joshua Tree Citizen Patrol

Joshua Tree is located midway between the Town of Yucca Valley and the City of Twentynine Palms. Follow Park Blvd. South and you will enter into Joshua Tree National Park, visited annually by millions of people from all over the world. The Park is famous for its seasonal wildflowers, natural diversity in terrain and is a mecca for serious rock climbers. Rich in history, Joshua Tree has a beautiful natural history museum containing artwork from local artists as well as other types of memorabilia.

National Association Citizens On Patrol

Be Seen ★ Be Heard ★ Make A Difference

The Joshua Tree Citizen Patrol provides valuable pro-active patrol to travelers along State Route 62, which is a popular route for vacationers visiting Las Vegas, Laughlin, and the Colorado River. Although small in size, the residents of this sleepy desert community have come to depend on the citizen patrol to help keep crime down. Board Officers for the year 2001 are: Commander, Syndie Priese; Vice Commander, Les Hackathorn; Secretary, Kat Bird; Treasurer, Alice Eaton.

Landers/Flamingo Heights/Yucca Mesa Citizen Patrol

The communities of Landers, Flamingo Heights and Yucca Mesa are located a few miles north of Yucca Valley and 50 miles south of Victorville. This rural area is made up of retired folks who purchased their property during the Homestead Act of the 1950's and young working couples who moved to the area for its rural atmosphere. One of the more popular sites in Landers is Giant Rock. It is a

giant freestanding rock that used to have a small café underneath it. Long since gone, tourists mostly visit the site to view the spectacular mountain range and the breathtaking display of seasonal wildflowers. In June of 1992, Landers was home of one of the strongest earthquakes felt in California. It measured 7.4 on the Richter scale and one person lost his life. Power was lost for days and some residents were without water for weeks while crews repaired the pipeline. It was during this time that the citizen patrol was utilized to help perform welfare checks on many elderly residents.

The Landers Citizen Patrol mostly contains young people within the community who still work full-time jobs. Between January and December, 2000, this energetic group contributed over 1,500 hours to their community!

Board Officers for the year 2001 are: Commander, Roxanna Shamay; Vice Commander,

Betty Butler; Secretary, Patty Schacht; Treasurer, Paula Carter.

Morongo Valley Citizen Patrol

Morongo Valley sits between two mountain ranges off of State Route 62, about 12 miles north of Interstate 10. With only twelve members, the Morongo Valley Citizen Patrol is an active group who averages 250 hours per month of pro-active patrol. Meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month, from 6:00 – 7:00 p.m., at Covington Park. Board Officers for the year 2001 are: Commander, Bill Burt; Vice Commander, Fred Rigel; Secretary/Treasurer, Pat Mason.

Yucca Valley Citizen Patrol

Incorporated on November 27, 1991, Yucca Valley is the most populated community in the Morongo Basin, covering 39 square miles, over 20,000 full-time residents and an annual influx of approximately 80,000 visitors. The Joshua Tree National Park borders the town to the south and contains Black Rock Canyon Campground.



A Morongo Basin Citizens Patrol group fingerprinting at their Crime Prevention Booth during a community event.

National Association Citizens On Patrol

Be Seen ★ Be Heard ★ Make A Difference

This campground accommodates equestrian facilities, a ranger station, and a small museum of local history. Visitors passing through will find the Town of Yucca Valley provides all the conveniences of a much larger city while still maintaining a rural atmosphere.

The Yucca Valley Citizen Patrol is a mix of retired folks and young people within the community whom still work full-time jobs. Between January and December, 2000, this energetic group of 26 volunteers contributed over 10,800 hours to their community! Board Officers for the year 2001 are: Commander, Roger Braham; Vice Commander, Tom Murren; Secretary, Lynne Vest; Treasurer, David Jones.

Coordinator For This Vast Area
The person who coordinates all seven Citizen Patrol Groups that are scattered over this vast 5,200 square mile area is Community Services Officer Arden Wiltshire. According to Officer Wiltshire: “excluding the administrative staff, there were originally a half dozen people involved in starting the citizen patrol. It was a combination of department employees and community members. Today there are over 145 Citizen Patrol volunteers within our seven groups. The Morongo Valley C.P. is housed in the fire station in Morongo Valley. Landers C.P. utilize the Disaster Center in Flamingo Heights. Yucca Valley C.P. has an office in the Public Safety

Center Building located next to the Community Center in Yucca Valley. Joshua Tree C.P. is housed at the Sheriff’s Station in Joshua Tree. 29 Palms C.P. has an office in the 29 Palms City Hall building and Cadiz C.P. keeps their vehicle and supplies at the Cadiz Land Company office in Cadiz. The equestrian patrol keeps their horses at their homes and owns their patrol equipment.”

Initial Goals

Officer Wiltshire states that “the initial goal for the Citizen Patrol groups was crime reduction. It wasn’t until later we realized the full potential of these volunteers.”

Transportation, Uniforms, and Gear

“Our first car,” said Officer Wiltshire, “was a Ford Taurus. We raised the money to purchase it with community donations. Today we currently have 11 citizen patrol vehicles. Most of them are 4-wheel drive Chevy Blazers and Ford Explorers. Our requirements are 4 doors, air conditioning and power steering. While on patrol, our volunteers wear white cotton shirts, forest green pants, black shoes or boots and pumpkin orange jackets. Our volunteers do not take enforcement action. On their person they are authorized to carry a key holder, flashlight and latex glove holder.”

To communicate with the stations and others, each

volunteer unit has at least one portable radio and one radio in their vehicle. The equestrian patrol uses a hand held portable radio, since they patrol on horseback. When needed, if they are already on patrol, they are trained to automatically respond to traffic accidents. If there is a unit on duty, they have a roster in the CAD computer (computer aided dispatch) which can be accessed by both the station and dispatch, located 75 miles north in Victorville.

Services Provided

Once on patrol additional services performed by the Citizen Patrol volunteers include:

- Providing vacation checks on residents’ homes while out of town
- Extra patrol to areas experiencing community problems
- Home security inspections (checking locks, windows, lighting, etc.)
- Business checks on businesses after hours
- Welfare checks to elderly folks and shut-ins
- Traffic control during accidents, power outages, and flooding
- Crime scene containment
- Assisting the Crime Prevention Officer with safety programs, such as Neighborhood Watch
- Providing a safety booth during special events (passing out literature and providing child fingerprinting)

National Association Citizens On Patrol

Be Seen ★ Be Heard ★ Make A Difference

“It has been proven,” said Officer Arden, “that the most successful crime prevention program a law enforcement agency can have is Citizen Patrol. The second most successful is Neighborhood Watch. Both consist of concerned citizens working with law enforcement to better their community by watching out for suspicious activity and reporting it.”

To become a member of the SBSO Citizen Patrol program you must be at least 18 years old, have a valid driver's license (any state, since they have a military installation in their community), and not have any felony convictions. Their background checks include a license check and neighborhood check. To attract new volunteers, they use press releases, media stories, crime prevention booths at various events, and word of mouth. Anytime a citizen patrol assists the department, they include them in the press release such as, directing traffic at an accident or fire, assisting with crime scenes, etc.

Training

Each volunteer must successfully complete a 50-hour training academy. During this academy students learn to provide the services listed above plus become certified in First Aid/CPR, Driver Awareness, and Radio/ Patrol Procedures. Volunteers purchase their own uniforms and

contribute sixteen hours per month to the Department.

\$672,000 Savings

“Our citizen patrol volunteers,” per Officer Wiltshire, “contributed 32,000 hours during 2000, which is a savings of approximately \$672,000 to the nine communities we serve. The population in the Morongo Basin is increasing rapidly. It has been proven that just the sight of the Sheriff's 'star' (on the citizen patrol vehicle) is effective in reducing crime.

“Members of the citizen patrol are volunteers,” continued Officer Wiltshire, “and do not receive pay for their services. Their reward is the satisfaction of a community that is lower in crime and safer for all who lives and works there.”

Gaining Acceptance

When asked how do you rate the overall acceptance of your Citizen Patrol group with the public and Deputies, Officer Wiltshire responded: “Neither one was very accepting at first. But eventually, both the public and deputies realized what an asset this group is, especially in directing traffic. Deputies appreciate being free to conduct an investigation or take a report and not have to worry about the “small stuff”. The public relies on citizen patrol volunteers to assist with traffic control at parades and other large events

and we can hardly keep up with the requests for safety programs and child fingerprinting requests.”

When asked if you could wave a “magic wand” and get whatever you wanted for your Citizen Patrol group, what one thing would you ask for her reply was: “The ability to provide them with uniforms as they currently purchase their own.” One issue is that the group's annual operating budget is very limited. Most of their funds are raised through fundraisers. The station does pay for the maintenance and fuel for their vehicles.

Motivating Members

To help motivate, recognize, and reward the Citizen Patrol Volunteers, Officer Wiltshire stated that, “for every 1000 hours they contribute to the department, we give them a certificate and a star on the cuff of a long sleeve shirt. They get a certificate and pin for every five years they are a volunteer. We host a volunteer picnic every summer. We also publish a monthly newsletter so everyone gets the same information and we recognize outstanding performance in it.”

We would like to thank Officer Wiltshire for taking the time to share this story of these dedicated groups of volunteers.

If your Citizen Patrol organization is a member of the NACOP and would like to be profiled in a future edition of "Eyes and Ears", please contact or e-mail us at editor@nacop.org and request a "Profile Form" to be sent to you. If you are not a member and would like to learn how you can become one, please contact us for a Membership Brochure.