

Organization Snapshot

Year Started: 1995
Number of Members: 50+
City Population: 25,000
Website: www.nacop.org/norco
Coordinator: Dan Hedge
Phone: 909-270-5673

A discussion with Deputy Dan Hedge, Norco Citizen Patrol Coordinator



The city of Norco is located within Riverside County, California, and is about 45 minutes east of Los Angeles. It borders the city of Corona, which is how it got its name, Norco, meaning North Corona. This community is very much a rural setting and boasts of being the “horse capital of the world” having more horses than its population of 25,000 people. In fact, recently a picture was taken in an open field that held over 2,000 horses and riders to help promote the city.

The Norco Citizens Patrol was founded in 1995 by a group of concerned citizens. Because of its rural and country setting, there was not a large tax base of businesses to support a strong law enforcement budget. The city of Norco contracts with the Riverside County Sheriff’s Department for its public safety and is the Sheriff’s Department’s oldest contract city. Years ago it was not uncommon to have only one deputy on patrol at a time. Today, with the city’s increased tax base, the Sheriff’s Department has over 20 personnel assigned to Norco with an annual budget of over \$2.2 million with \$18,000 earmarked for the NCP. The average annual savings to the law enforcement budget from the use of the Norco Citizens Patrol is over \$250,000. The city is able to obtain this significant savings by using the Norco Citizens Patrol to augment the Sheriff’s Department to help with security and traffic control at local events such as High School football games, professional rodeos, school graduations, fairs, and other specialized activities. The amount of money saved by the Norco Citizens Patrol is almost equal to the total budget of some of the city’s departments. Clearly the volunteers save the city a substantial amount of money each year while helping to reduce crime by an average of 20% per year.

In The Beginning

The Norco Citizens Patrol organization was originally made up of about ten founding members, many of whom are still volunteers today. This group of citizens chose to start the Norco Citizens Patrol to help augment the city’s Sheriff’s Department and free up the deputies with duties they could perform while acting as additional “Eyes and Ears” to help reduce and prevent crime. Today the group has over forty active members ranging from young men and women to retired senior citizens. The volunteers are technically City of Norco employees at will and carry City of Norco ID cards. To help recruit new members, the NCP will set up booths manned by their volunteers at local

Most Significant Event

In 1999 members of the NCP while on patrol observed a “245 ADW”, assault with a deadly weapon in progress. They followed the suspect and called sheriff’s dispatch with the license plate number of the vehicle. They continued to follow the suspect vehicle until Deputies arrived and made the arrest of the two felony suspects without incident.

events such as fairs and store grand openings in addition to running large newspaper ads from time to time. The group has recently developed a new color recruiting brochure offered as a service by the National Association Citizens On Patrol to help get the word out and present an even more professional appearance. According to Art Femister, President of the NACOP, "The Norco Citizens Patrol is the first group to take advantage of this service and we are pleased to help them. This goes to show their commitment to continued recruiting which is critical to maintaining a strong organization."

*City of Norco Sheriff's and
Citizen Patrol Office*



The NCP started with one patrol car which was an older model Chevy Caprice handed down from the city's Fire Department. Today's fleet includes a 1999 Ford Crown Victoria Police Inceptor model that runs on Compressed Natural Gas which was obtain for the group by using funds from a "Clean Air Act" grant. The other patrol vehicles include a 1999 Ford Explorer XLT, a newer Ford Aerostar Van and an older Oldsmobile two door sedan. All NCP patrol vehicles are equipped with a full amber light bar on the roof, which includes a front "take down light" and side alley lights in addition to side handle controlled spotlights. The two new Fords also include blinking amber lights in the rear windows for additional visibility and safety. In 1999, the NCP patrolled more than 18,000 miles in their cars. Each volunteer is provided with a full uniform that includes light blue shirts with shoulder patches embroidered with "City of Norco Sheriff Volunteer" and the NCP star on the front left and dark blue pants. They are also provided with their own dark blue zipper lined jacket for those cold nights and winter days in addition to a ball cap with the NCP star in front.

Gaining Acceptance

According to Deputy Hedge, "The biggest challenge for the Norco Citizens Patrol, in the beginning, like most Citizen Patrol groups, was gaining the acceptance of law enforcement and the community alike. Once the deputies saw the NCP in action helping out with traffic control during major accidents and road closures, they began to see the benefit of these citizen volunteers realizing their own time could be better spent on crime prevention activities and enforcing the laws." Deputy Hedge further added, "The city's residents have really come to rely on the Norco Citizens Patrol for help with special events such as the Norco Fair, the annual 10K run, and, of course, help with traffic control during the city's many horse related events and group rides. Last year our volunteers donated over 8,000 hours of their time for regular patrols and special events and responded to over 100 calls for assistance."

Location, Location

In the beginning the Citizen Patrol volunteers had their offices separate from the Sheriff's Department a few blocks away and kept their cars in another location. While it made sense at the time, the logistics could have been better. In 1999, the city expanded their Sheriff's offices at which time the

Citizens Patrol office was moved in with them. Today the deputies and Citizen Patrol Volunteers share the same facilities and house their patrol cars at the same location. This move has really helped to shore up the relationship between the deputies and the volunteers. Before going out on patrol, the Citizen Patrol Volunteers usually have a chance to interact with the deputies and exchange any important information they may need such as avoiding a certain area because of undercover activity going on or other law enforcement related activities. "Now our deputies and volunteers get to know each other as people rather than functions and have developed a good bond," says Deputy Hedge. "Not only do we work together as a team while on patrol but we now attend joint social functions. It's not uncommon for the Citizens Patrol to have a summer pool party at a member's house and have several deputies and the Chief of Police Services attend," states Hedge.

Communicate and Be Prepared

Before going out on patrol the volunteers gather up their gear at the Sheriff's Station. For safety considerations, two volunteers are required to be in a patrol car together while on duty. Each car has a two-way radio to communicate between other Norco Citizen Patrol cars and the NCP dispatcher located in the Sheriff's Station. Each volunteer also carries an "HT" (portable two way radio) when they leave the vehicle. To communicate with the Sheriff's Dispatch and report suspicious activity or request the assistance of public safety personnel, they are also equipped with a cell phone and have a special phone number to call which puts them directly in touch with the Sheriff's Dispatch. The cell phones also allow the Sheriff's Dispatchers to call the Citizens Patrol when they are requested by the deputies to respond to their location for assistance. This special dedicated confidential phone number is critical because in California, when you dial "911" from a cellular phone, you automatically get connected to the CHP (California Highway Patrol), not your local police agency. "The Sheriff's Dispatchers are familiar with the Norco Citizens Patrol and treat them as part of the department when they call in for assistance," says Deputy Hedge. "We have recently made available for each team while on patrol a Sheriff's 'receive only' HT radio which functions as a scanner. This allows the Citizen Patrol volunteers to be aware of what is happening law enforcement-wise in the city. Should there be a dangerous situation in progress such as a man with a gun, we can notify the Citizen Patrol Volunteers to stay clear of that area," adds Deputy Hedge. In addition to the radios and cell phones, each patrol vehicle is fully equipped with First Aid kits, flares, personal safety vests, hand held stop signs for traffic control, portable flood lights, jumper cables, and several other safety related items. The NCP volunteers do not carry any form of weapon or pepper spray and are encouraged to avoid any type of physical conflict that could endanger them. During the past five years no member has ever been injured while on patrol nor has anyone ever been attacked or threatened. "I believe this goes to show the level of professionalism and acceptance our members have achieved in the eyes of the public at large," says Deputy Hedge.

Norco Citizen Patrol Volunteer directing traffic during a recent horse riders event.



Membership Requirements

To become a member of the Norco Citizens Patrol, individuals must first complete an application and undergo a background check. Trainees then will attend sixteen hours of formal classroom training by a Deputy, become trained in CPR and First Aid, and complete a ride-along with a Sheriff's Deputy on patrol to better understand how the Deputies on the street work. The trainees also complete a ride-along with experienced NCP volunteers prior to going on patrol themselves to learn patrol procedures. As the group's coordinator, Deputy Hedge says that, once on board, the number one challenge he faces is "keeping the members interested and challenged. We are always looking for new ideas and things for the group to do which will keep them excited about their position. The good news is our city has a very low crime rate, which is due in part to the NCP's efforts, so we really focus on crime prevention." Some of the common services the Norco Citizens Patrol offers to the community are vacation checks for out-of-town homeowners, checks on the welfare of disabled and seniors home alone, along with ongoing business checks while on patrol. In addition, the group offers fingerprinting of small children at fairs, and some volunteers have been trained by the Sheriff's Department to lift fingerprints at crime scenes as a service to the Deputies. The group is always open to new ways of serving the community and improving the quality of life for all which is one of the reasons they volunteer their time in the first place.

Motivate and Recognize

To keep the volunteers coming back each week to patrol the streets and give their own time for special events is an ongoing process. Like most people, they will spend their time doing things they enjoy and feel good about. "Our number one concern, other than their safety, is making sure they know we appreciate their time," says Deputy Hedge. To help let the volunteers know they are sincerely appreciated the NCP does a number of things. Each quarter a volunteer is honored with a "Volunteer of the Quarter" award in addition to a "Volunteer of the Year" award. The members name and picture is posted on the NCP's web site, which is, www.nacop.org/norco. Each year the city of Norco and the Sheriff's Department hosts a banquet for all the volunteers with a nice dinner and presentations. A committee of NCP members also seeks out donations of money and gifts from the community which is then handed out to the volunteers. Some of the past gifts have included dinner gift certificates, and gift certificates for three days and two nights at a Nevada Casino. There are always enough gifts to go around which ensures everyone leaves the banquet with something. When all is said and done, it's the individual volunteer's own pride and commitment to their community which keeps him going and the public is always the winner!

The Norco Citizens Patrol is a founding member of the National Association Citizens On Patrol and was the first organization to join. We are also happy to report that over the years, three of their members have moved on to become full time members of law enforcement. All three credit their experience and training with the Norco Citizens Patrol as having helped.

We would like to thank Deputy Hedge for taking the time to share with "Eyes and Ears" this informative look into the Norco Citizens Patrol.

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.