

Rancho Cucamonga, California, Citizens On Patrol

Organization Snapshot

Year Started: 1985
Number of Members: 40+
City Population: 117,000
Website: www.nacop.org/rancho
Coordinator: Corporal Allen
Phone: 909-477-2888

A discussion with Corporal Chris Allen, Rancho Cucamonga Citizen Patrol Coordinator

The city of Rancho Cucamonga is located in San Bernardino County, California and is considered a semi rural community as it sits at the bottom of the San Gabriel Mountains and covers over thirty-six square miles. It is home to over 117,000 residents and is expected to grow to over 170,000 within the next ten years. The name "Cucamonga" comes from the Shoshonean Indian word "kukamonga" which means "sandy place" although it is not located near the beach but is 37 miles east of downtown

Los Angeles. The city was incorporated in 1977. The city of Rancho Cucamonga contracts its police services from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department and has ninety sworn officers.

Over fifteen years ago about ten residents of the city started the third Citizens Patrol group within the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department which is overseen by the Volunteer Forces group at Sheriff's headquarters. Their first patrol car was a Chevy Chevette donated by a local Chevrolet dealer. Initial goals of the Citizens Patrol group was like most, to act as additional "Eyes and Ears" for their law enforcement department and provide extra services such as home vacation checks for out of town residents. According to Corporal Chris Allen, the group's coordinator, "Our initial challenge was to prove to the deputies that the Citizens Patrol could be of value and earn their respect. Over the years they have done that and more." Today the group of 43 Citizen Patrol volunteers have greatly expanded their services to the community. They have expanded their roles to include providing traffic control at accident and crime scenes, help search for missing children and the elderly, and are authorized to write tickets for offensives such as unauthorized Handicap Parking. The group also helps to provide a secure environment for families and residents at the city's "Movies in the Park" nights. They also participate in planned "mock" bank robberies that the Sheriff's Department conducts at local banks and financial institutions to help prepare the employees in the event of the real thing.

No Horsing Around

The Rancho Cucamonga Citizens Patrol group also has an equestrian patrol whereby a limited number of members who have their own horses are able to attend special training for themselves and their horses. Upon successful completion of the training, the volunteers can then patrol their city's horse trails and remote areas. The training includes topics such as "horse sensitivity". You might think this involves getting to know your horse better and bonding with him; and, in a sense, you'd be correct. The training actually helps the horses become more familiar with things they might encounter in a law enforcement role such as an approaching patrol car, a fire truck with lights and sirens blaring, or a Sheriff's Search and Rescue helicopter circling low overhead. The course involves actually subjecting the horses and riders to these actions. Not all horses can withstand this type of active environment and pass the course. "You'd be surprised what goes on and the things we find out in the remote horse trails," says Corporal Allen. "Our members are also authorized to write tickets for vehicles that block horse paths and other violations. It's very important for their safety and the public's that they can handle stressful situations."

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Back to the Street

The group's current patrol cars are all Ford Explorers fully equipped with amber light bars on the roofs and remote controlled spotlights. Each vehicle is equipped with a Sheriff's 800mhz two-way radio which connects them directly with the Sheriff's Dispatch Center. To differentiate themselves from full-time deputies, their radio designation is "Victor" as in "volunteer". "Having the ability to speak directly with the dispatch center and the deputies has proven to be a great asset," says Mark Fenton, a long time member of the group. "Knowing we are just a microphone click away from getting help, if needed, is a great relief when you patrol a city as large as ours," adds Fenton. Each member is issued a standard uniform used by all 800-plus Citizen Patrol volunteers of the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department which includes a white short sleeve shirt with the SBSD's shoulder patch. The front breast patch is a modified "star badge" which identifies them as a Citizen Volunteer. Members do not carry any form of weapons; however, the HT radio, which provides direct contact to deputies, is very powerful. The group's offices are located with the Sheriff's office within the city as are their patrol cars.



Recruitment and Training

The city's Citizen Patrol group has no problem getting members; and, in fact, has a waiting list of those wanting to join. This is due in part to the formal training program that runs only about once a year. Upon completion of a background check and initial acceptance, the volunteer will attend over fifty-two hours of training which includes: an Overview of the SBSD, Civil Liability, Introduction to law, Operating Procedures, Traffic Control, Radio Procedures, Media Relations, Crime Prevention, Basic Sign Language, CPR, First Aid and a Drivers Awareness program that includes completing a controlled road test with cones and barriers set up for evasive action. The volunteers receive additional on going training at their monthly meetings arranged by their volunteer training coordinator. All Citizen Patrol Volunteers are considered members of the Sheriff's Department and are issued SBSD Volunteer picture ID's. "Once trained," said Corporal Allen, "most of our members are very active. In June, 2000, our volunteers donated 889 hours of their time and patrolled 1,275 miles. Year-to-date as of July, 2000, our volunteers have contributed over 5,112 hours of their own time. When you consider the national average rate placed on volunteers time is about \$16.00 an hour, that adds up to a year-to-date value of \$81,792 donated by our forty-three Citizen Patrol Volunteers." To help recognize the efforts of the volunteers, the city sponsors a yearly luncheon for the members and issues a Citizen Patrol Volunteer of the Year award. Also, whenever a volunteer works above their minimum monthly commitment of 12 hours, they receive a gift certificate.

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Rancho Cucamonga Citizen Patrol Car and Citizen Patrol volunteers

Challenges

When asked what he felt their number one challenge was, Corporal Allen said, "Having more people wanting to join than we can accommodate. We still continue to recruit and advertise on the local cable channel and at horse riding clubs to keep our backlog of potential members filled for when we can accept more volunteers." When further asked what are the most common issues he deals with and what he would like the most, Corporal Allen responds without hesitation, "for our members to work in harmony together. Part of my job as the coordinator is ironing out minor personality issues and conflicts. The reality is we cannot be all things to all people, just like in society, and sometimes we just have to put our differences aside to work together as a team." From the overall acceptance by the community, city, and law enforcement, it is evident that the volunteers in Ranch Cucamonga's Citizens Patrol are doing a good job of that and working hard to help make their community an even safer place for all!

We would like to thank Corporal Allen for taking the time to share with "Eyes and Ears" this informative look into the Rancho Cucamonga Citizens Patrol.

Most Significant Event

During a major fire that occurred in the city about 5 years ago, the Citizens Patrol group worked for 48 hours nonstop with the Fire Department and law enforcement to help evacuate horses and livestock while also conducting traffic control around the fire area. Today there are many happy horses who are still alive thanks to the efforts of these Citizen Patrol 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.