

**Organization Snapshot**

**Year Started:** 1980  
**Number of Members:** 100+  
**City Population:** 50,000  
**Website:** www.nacop.org/  
northmiamibeach  
**Coordinator:** Tom Carney  
**Phone:** 305-948-2955

**A discussion with Officer Tom Carney,  
North Miami Beach Citizen Patrol Coordinator**

North Miami Beach, Florida, is a multi-ethnic community of approximately 50,000 residents situated several miles north of the City of Miami. The residents are supplemented by hundreds of thousands of tourists who visit the local beach area and other area attractions. The Citizen Patrol group is headed up by Officer Tom Carney who offers us the following valuable insight into the city's historic Citizen Patrol organization.

According to Carney, "Our Citizen Patrol program was introduced to the NMBPD in 1980 by a small group of local citizens interested in aiding our community in the fight against crime. One of the founders of our organization is still active with us today. His volunteer efforts were, and still are, directed at providing dispatch and radio communications to our members from our radio base in a very unique way. He is a combat wounded D-Day veteran of World War II and is totally blind. He is the only founding member that still remains active in our program. Initially there were about 10 residents involved with one of our local Citizens Crime Watches. Because of the popularity of the CB radio during the 70's and early 80's, the Crime Watch group recruited local residents who were willing to patrol their neighborhoods and report suspicious activity over the CB to the police department who also had a CB base station.

**Citizen Patrol Goals**

"Initially our goals were to reduce crimes like trespassing and eliminate loiterers around the business community. The biggest challenge faced in the beginning was getting the police officers to accept the help of our civilian volunteers. Our volunteers were not well received or respected by many officers in the police department. However, due to the persistence of several officers who recognized the importance of this type of program, our program is now a welcomed part of our 'police family' by both the officers and the community at large.

**Citizen Patrol Vehicles**

"From 1980 until 1998, the Citizen Patrol volunteers used their own vehicles to patrol. The department provided magnetic door signs for the volunteers to attach to their personal vehicles along with yellow revolving dashboard lights. A small allowance of gasoline was given to each active COP, once a month. Once during the early stages of the program, the postal service donated an old post office jeep to our program. The jeep was painted and magnetic signs were placed on the sides. In 1998 the police department donated old police vehicles to the program. We currently have 5 older police vehicles (Ford Taurus' and Crown Victorias) painted, marked, and equipped for use by the COP.

"Today we have approximately 107 Citizen Patrol volunteers. For uniforms we issue polo shirts, light windbreaker

**Most Significant Event**

The most significant was the capture of a murder suspect in the getaway vehicle that had just killed a woman during a robbery. The COP spotted the vehicle and followed it until police arrived and arrested the suspect.

North Miami Beach, Florida, Citizens On Patrol

type jackets and baseball caps that are embroidered with the police logo and COP logo. We have considered a more formal uniform, however, the majority of the COP's prefer polo shirts as the weather in south Florida is a factor.

"We supply our Citizen Patrol volunteers with rechargeable flashlights, aluminum clip boards, hand held radios and cellular phones for each member to check out and use during patrol. They must check them in for others to use after their shift. We house our Citizens on Patrol in the Crime

North Miami Beach Police Station



Prevention Unit so they have office space in the police station. Our Citizens on Patrol communicate with both two way radios and cellular telephones. The C.O.P's are required to have both on patrol, in case the radio goes down, they have a cell phone backup. We have our own radio channel that is monitored by police dispatchers and used for our activity. We require a fair amount of initial training and you can view our web page [www.nacop.org/northmiamibeach](http://www.nacop.org/northmiamibeach) for the information on the basic training and FTO training. We add additional training as needed.

"Our Citizens on Patrol offer vacation checks, watch order checks usually of businesses, basic security surveys of residences and small businesses. The COP are used in a variety of ways for special events like traffic control, especially after hurricanes when all the power is out, etc. They assist the Crime Prevention Unit at special events, block parties, town meetings, crime scene control, etc.

**Recruiting and Retaining Members**

"Our biggest challenge first, is recruiting new members. Second is keeping the existing members happy and keeping them from being bored. We continually try to involve our COP in as many programs as possible. We recruit new members by using TV, radio, newspaper and recruiting efforts at shopping centers. In the near future, the police department will have a weekly, live call-in TV show on our local cable system. We will dedicate specific episodes to the Citizens On Patrol and use that time to talk about the program and recruit new members. Overall the acceptance of our Citizens on Patrol is very good in all aspects. The Chief, Mayor and Council especially like the program. You need support like that to run the program correctly."

When asked if they could wave a "Magic Wand" and get whatever they wanted, what would they ask for, Carney replied, "I would probably have to say from a Citizens Patrol standpoint, that the COP's get more respect and support for their efforts from both a law enforcement and community perspective. I have been in law enforcement for 28 years and know the issue of volunteers in law enforcement will never be totally accepted 100% by all police officers and all members of the community. However, most members of both groups realize that during times when police budgets get smaller and the public image of the police suffer, we will all benefit from the dedication and support of these individuals."

**COP Common Issues and Problems**

When asked, what are the most common issues/problems you face, Carney's response was, "On occasion an over zealous but well meaning COP may cross the line that separates civilian volunteers from sworn officers, in his or her efforts to help out. When this happens it can sometimes be difficult for the volunteer to understand that his actions, even though well intended, cannot be allowed. This has to be accomplished using diplomacy so that the COP realizes the error of their ways; however, that we, the police department, appreciate his volunteer efforts. This must be done in such a way that the overall effect on the COP program is not a negative one."

**Budget**

"With regards to budget," Carney continued, "we really don't have a formal budget. The department is very generous when I ask for something for the COP. As long as I can justify it, I usually get it. Also, we use forfeiture funds for most purchases. Florida law states 15% of all forfeiture funds must be spent on crime prevention programs, etc. That's why COP is part of the Crime Prevention Unit. We have a good amount of forfeiture funds available to use because of the large amount of drug traffic in south Florida." For special events, "you name it, we do it," says Carney. "Veterans and Memorial Day are big events in our city and the COP take part in various ways every year."

**Motivating Volunteers**

"Motivating volunteers is always a challenge", according to Carney. "We try to motivate our members first, by having a rank structure that permits members to strive for promotion. Then we use the Supervisors or FTO's to train probationary members of the program.

"Recognition and appreciation is always necessary for any volunteer organization to thrive. We have a large appreciation and awards dinner every year. We also take the COP on various fields trips to law enforcement related events or attractions. The National Police Museum is in Miami. We go to the



North Miami Beach Citizen Patrol Car

Medical Examiners Office, the US Coast Guard Base and Customs Base Drug Interdiction Unit, local jail tours, etc. We also have a summer picnic for the Citizens on Patrol”.

We'd like to thank Officer Carney for taking the time to share with “Eyes and Ears” this most valuable look at one of the nations oldest known Citizen Patrol programs.

*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.*