

Organization Snapshot

Year Started: 1995
Number of Members: 21
City Population: 3,000
Website: www.nacop.org/chelsea
Founder: Mr. Jay Jerman

A discussion with Jay Jerman, Chelsea Citizen Observer Patrol founder

We asked Mr. Jay Jerman a series of questions about the Chelsea Citizen Observer Patrol and their experiences. His responses are as follows.

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

Chelsea Alabama is approximately fifteen miles southeast of Birmingham and is located right in the center of Shelby County. The town was incorporated in 1995 with a population of 913. The 2000 census showed a dramatic growth to approximately 3,000. Chelsea is the fastest growing city in the state of Alabama.



Chelsea Citizen Observer Patrol volunteer using Nextel phone.

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

Jay Jerman was involved in the original incorporation of Chelsea. Mr. Jerman sat on the town fire and police committee for five years after the town was established and provided the leadership necessary to start up the COP organization. The Citizen Observer Patrol was formed with joint sponsorship from the local Shelby County Sheriff and the Town of Chelsea to keep the town safe while it was experiencing dramatic growth without incurring the cost of a police department. Prior to incorporation, the Sheriff had agreed to continue to provide law enforcement for the town once it was formed.

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

The Chelsea town council passed a resolution establishing the COP program on Dec 1, 1998. The first training class was held in February, 1999, with twelve volunteers. The policy setting group is called the "General Management Committee (GMC) which consists of one town councilman; the Chief Deputy from the Shelby County Sheriff's Office; Jay Jerman, founder and manager; and Phil Williams, COP Volunteer and second in command.

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

Initially our focus was only security patrols of business and neighborhoods. When the Shelby County Sheriff's Office reviewed our procedures, they suggested that we allow the COP to assist them with traffic control.

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

Initially the biggest challenge was getting the Mayor and town Council on board with the COP concept. Today the Mayor and Town Council love the COP program. Our biggest challenge now is ongoing recruiting of professional, committed, volunteers.

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

Our volunteers use their own cars. We have equipment bags staged at the fire stations and other locations, which include magnetic signs, magnetic green light bars, flashlights, vests, etc. We can turn out eight two-man patrol cars with our current equipment.

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

The Sheriff has offered us retired patrol cars. The town has been reluctant to allow us to use a city owned car. This year, however, we are trying to get the first one approved.

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What type of uniforms do you have?

We have designed our own very professional-looking uniform. It consists of white shirts, a black hat and black trousers. We have security patches on the sleeve and a Chelsea COP logo for the left breast pocket location. Each member wears an engraved name tag, whistle, chain and hanger, as well as earned ribbons outlined in the Volunteer Merit Program.

How many Citizen Patrol volunteers do you actively have now?

Currently, we have twenty-three volunteers on the rolls, eighteen of which are active.

What type of equipment do your members carry?

Individual volunteers are issued a Nextel phone on our private radio network, a vest, Mag flashlight, traffic wand, basic first aid items, whistle, uniform shirt, and a uniform hat.

Where is your Citizen Patrol office located?

We utilize the town hall for our meeting facilities.

How do you communicate between

cars, volunteers and Law Enforcement? Cell phones, radios?

We use Nextel cell/radio phones on a private COP network. Patrols communicate with Shelby County Sheriff's Office dispatch by cell phone. The dispatch notifies the local deputies by text message which COP's are on patrol and how to reach them by cell phone. They then broadcast on the COP radio that they are on patrol. We also receive text messages from 911 for all fire and rescue calls in Chelsea. Each patrol monitors both Shelby County Sheriff's Office and 911 frequencies by scanner.

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

Patrols go directly to the scene when the call is announced on the scanner. Special requests are made by cell phone from Shelby County Sheriff's Office directly to the patrol on duty.

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

Initial formal training includes six hours of videotape, review of the Operations Manual, and then fifteen hours of supervised patrol with four different experienced volunteers.

Do you offer any Special Services to the public or Law Enforcement such as fingerprinting, vacation checks, Traffic control, crime scene control, stolen car checks, etc?

We provide vacation checks, traffic control, etc.

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

An applicant must be 21years old or over and make a commitment to serve a minimum of three hours per week. Prior to being accepted as a member, the Shelby County Sheriff's Office will conduct a background check on each candidate.

What were your most current year's statistics such as number 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?

In the last two years our volunteers have contributed over 4,500 hours of patrol time using their own cars and gas. Our patrols have resulted in the arrest of drunk drivers, wrong-way drivers, and operators of vehicles with no driver's license. We have also extinguished a



Left to Right: Alicia Johnson, Chief Chris Curry Shelby County Sheriffs Office, Jay Jerman, Phil Williams, Imogene Roberts, Donald Shirley, Charlie Woodrow, Eddie Huggins

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car fire, rescued a driver from a car that had flipped over and was still running and smoking, and pursued a gas drive off.

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

Our number one, ongoing challenge is recruiting.

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

Most of our members are recruited by word of mouth, city newsletter, and public relations pamphlet. We plan to assign one volunteer to be in charge of recruiting and set up an information desk in front of the local Winn Dixie on one Saturday per month.

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

Acceptance has been very positive with both the public and the Shelby County Sheriff's Office with only one or two exceptions on the part of individual deputies.

If you could wave a "magic wand" and get whatever you wanted for your Citizen Patrol group, what one thing would you ask for? (tough question but an interesting one)

If we could wave a "magic wand" and get whatever we wanted, having our own patrol cars would be on the top of the list. We would also like authorization to use radar for studies and to report serious violators and more active volunteers.

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

We need ways for the less assertive volunteers to hook up with partners for patrols.



Chelsea COPs being interviewed by the television news crew.

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

The city has provided a budget of approximately eleven thousand dollars annually.

What special events do you provide support for such as High School football games, Fairs, Graduations, traffic control for Marathon's and clean up days, etc?

We provide support for all the activities mentioned above as well as local parades.

Has any Citizen Patrol member ever been injured while performing their

duties?

We are pleased to state that none of our members have ever been injured while on duty.

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

We recognize our volunteers through our Volunteer of the year awards. We also have Volunteer Merit Program (ribbons), and, each year, the Mayor personally grills our steaks at the Mayor's Appreciation Dinner.

What was the most significant event known that your Citizen Patrol group can take credit for such as they called

Most Significant Event

"rescued a driver from a car that had flipped over and was still running and smoking"