TALES FROM THE FRONT
COMMUNITY RELATIONS
STRATEGIES FOR
PUBLIC SAFETY

Ann Tennes
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Village of Skokie
Skokie’s community relations outreach initiatives for public safety center primarily on policing, with a few programs that also include the fire department.
The Village’s community relations initiatives are developed around two main themes:
1. Building relationships
2. Exchange of information
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS
Block captains recruited as a central point of contact for neighbors

Block captains recruited at board/commission reception – personal appeal from Mayor

Block captain recruitment question included in recent public safety survey – good response
Block parties encouraged in community

- Village board gives annual ‘block party of the year’ award
- Organizers can request a visit from the fire department, and beat police officers stop by
COPS WITH KIDS
COPS WITH KIDS

- Benefits 50 elementary and middle school students recommended by their school principal as those who might gain the most from a positive adult connection, especially with a police officer
- Held in December 2015 and 2016
- Funded by donations to the police union from private citizens and local businesses
- Each child receives a $100 Walmart gift card to shop for holiday gifts for themselves and their families
- A uniformed officer shops with each child
Officer Anderson assists loading holiday packages and in return received a warm hug from this Skokie student.
COMMUNITY EVENTS
The Fire and Police Departments have a community outreach presence at Skokie’s annual Festival of Cultures, Backlot Bash and National Night Out and at other events by invitation:

- End-of-year school celebrations
- Houses of worship
- Farmers’ Market, etc.
COMMUNITY SPAGHETTI DINNERS AT SKOKIE FIREHOUSES
The informal, free dinners were offered as a means of community engagement to bring neighbors, first responders and elected officials together in a neighborhood setting.
Three dinners held in fall 2016, one at each fire station

Sundays, 5 to 7 p.m.

Catered dinners held on apparatus floor

Determined with fire administration that 150 people per event was maximum

RSVP required

Borrowed tables/chairs from park district

Management staff and elected officials participated as wait staff, greeters, etc.

No speeches, just introduction of officials, staff, firefighters and beat police officers
- Fliers at National Night Out
- Village newsletter
- E-blast
- Police Department Facebook page
All three events quickly reached capacity, with waitlists

No one turned away

Drew intergenerational, diverse crowds

Firefighters and beat police officers attended and mingled
$5,000 total budget

Only spent $4,044; 19% under budget

Expectation to repeat in fall 2018
MANY CULTURES, ONE COMMUNITY - KEEPING SKOKIE SAFE
The Many Cultures, One Community – Keeping Skokie Safe public safety campaign was launched in summer 2015.

Originated from Public Safety Commission’s desire for a crime prevention education program.

Keeping Skokie safe by:

- Engaging and educating residents
- Exploring community partnerships
- Concentrating Village resources from myriad
Program designed to contribute to a secure, aesthetically pleasing environment that is essential to community safety and pride

Focus areas determined for maximum impact

The Public Safety Commission reviewed community maps depicting locations of various crimes, including battery, aggravated battery, assault, robbery and burglary
CAMPAIGN COMPONENTS

The campaign includes four component areas led by:

- Police Department
- Public Works Department
- Property Standards Division
- Community Engagement – Marketing and Public Information Division
Increased use of Community Outreach Police Substation (COPS) Vehicle

- 30, three-hour neighborhood visits in June, July and August
- 2015 and 2016 – on neighborhood streets, Thursday through Sunday
- Initial postcard mailing; schedule published weekly
- 2017-12 visits to parks, Friday and Saturday, 4:30-7:30 p.m.
- Increases communication with neighbors and police officers, distribution of crime prevention literature, treats, prizes
- Officials sometimes attend
- Officers and officials go door-to-door, walk the neighborhood.
Environmental Improvements through Public Works:

- Infrastructure focus on visible aesthetics
  - Curbs, potholes, signage and pavement markings, etc.
- Increased lighting
  - Trim trees, test bulbs
  - Install new lighting on select east-west streets
  - Promote resident-funded alley lighting on utility poles
- Beautification Commission
  - Park clean-up project
- Increased monitoring of property maintenance, litter removal, overall focus on compliance and communication to landlords
Health Department and Human Services Division staff attend COPS vehicle neighborhood visits to disseminate literature and speak with residents.

Organized block parties in focus areas in concert with social service agency Youth & Opportunity United (Y.O.U.).
MARKETING DIVISION

- Collaborates with Police Department to equip COPS vehicle with literature, prizes, food and multi-lingual Village information sheets for deployments
- Coordinated 2015 and 2016 mailings and open houses for focus-area residents
- Coordinates COPS vehicle community partner participation schedule
- Coordinates all publicity
COMMUNITY PARTNERS
Hosts free barbeque and outdoor games at focus-area parks in concert with COPS vehicle neighborhood visits (and at National Night Out)
LIBRARY

- Hosts story time and children’s games in concert with COPS vehicle neighborhood visits
Elementary school districts and ELL Parent Center in focus areas distribute program information to families.

COPS vehicle invited to end-of-year parent meeting.
SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES

- Invited to have staff at COPS vehicle neighborhood visits and/or provide literature for distribution

- Y.O.U. parent group collaborates with Human Services Division and Human Services Commission on focus-area block party
Houses of worship in focus areas invited to participate in COPS vehicle neighborhood visits
Police Department
- COPS Vehicle - $280,000
  - Note: primary purpose of COPS vehicle is to serve as a mobile command unit, with community relations an ancillary – but important – additional use
- Overtime - $20,000 to $25,000 for 360 hours at time and a half
- Giveaways, food, fliers, postcards, etc. - $2,500 to $4,000

Public Works – no overtime costs; seasonal employees utilized

Health/Human Services – no overtime costs; comp time given to participating staff
BLOTTER
Village dissatisfied with media’s sensational coverage and repeated inaccuracies

Within FOIA guidelines, began producing in-house blotter published several times weekly prior to newspapers

Posted on web, on Police Department Facebook page

Established as community go-to for public safety information
COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS
It is imperative to establish positive relationships and strong communications channels with fellow governments, the faith community, social service agencies, school districts, community groups and in neighborhoods so that they are in place before a crisis occurs.
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