

Making of PACT

"Standing on the street corner with the vial of crack cocaine palmed in his hand, the young drug dealer knows it is just a matter of time before he makes a sale. He knows who his customers are and just what to do. What he does not know is two citizens have already called the Hickory Police Department. The citizens have given a complete description of the drug dealer and exactly where he is standing. They have offered their names to validate what they have said. The drug dealer also is not aware two police officers are already in place. One waits patiently along a path used by drug dealers as an escape route, the other is bicycling up the street to confront the drug dealer. Within minutes the arrest has been made and the crack cocaine seized. It appears simple, but years of work have gone into this drug bust. Citizens willing to give information and officers knowing how to make the arrest is the result of a process begun seven years earlier."

Like many cities, Hickory is comprised of several smaller communities within the City limits. One of these communities is Ridgeview. Located in the southwest section of Hickory, the area contains most of the City's public housing, a small amount of industry and some retail stores. While the Ridgeview community had long been marred by violence, the growing popularity of drugs (particularly crack cocaine) led to a sharp increase in violent crime during the latter part of the 1980's. During this time, the communication gap between the citizens of Ridgeview and the Police Department also seemed to widen. Cooperation between citizens and the police was not as good as desired, limiting the effectiveness of the police.

In early 1989, the Hickory Police Department began to initiate programs to reduce the crime and regain the trust of the citizens. Initial efforts involved 45 to 50 police officers sweeping into the highest crime areas of Ridgeview and making mass arrests. The concept behind these sweeps, called "Operation Pressure Point", was not only to impact the drug trade, but to show the citizens that the police were committed to making a change.

A full time program was instituted in Ridgeview October, 1989, called R.E.A.C.H. (Ridgeview Enforcement and Community Help project). This involved six officers working night time in the community strictly for enforcement. The six officers did not respond to routine calls for service, but rather devoted his or her entire efforts to enforcement. This project laid further groundwork to reduce crime and show the citizens of Ridgeview that police were committed to improving the quality of life in the neighborhood. The hope was that this show of police commitment could bring the same from residents.

P.A.C.T. (Police and Community Together) began in Ridgeview in October, 1990. This was the next step in addressing the area and implemented the full concept of Community Policing. Six officers, all volunteers, were assigned to the area. Unlike past initiatives, these officers would now make up a self-contained unit in the area, handling not only enforcement, but also all calls for service. The hours were expanded to include daylight hours as well as night. A police substation was established at the Public Housing Authority property. This new initiative involved a complete change in the police organization and culture embracing the concepts of Community Policing and a total integration of police services with members of the community to solve problems.

In September, 1991, Hickory City Council funded two additional officers, bringing the total to eight. But, even with the additional officers, P.A.C.T.'s could not provide police coverage 24 hours per day. September of 1992, the City Council allocated four more officers for the initiative. The additional officers allowed the unit to cover the area 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with no fewer than two working at any time.

Today, P.A.C.T. is an integral part of the entire Community. Twelve officers work in the original P.A.C.T. area (Ridgeview) under decentralized supervision, having the freedom to solve problems in the area as they arise. Statistics show that calls for service have declined. Even more importantly, drive by shootings, murder, and other violent crimes are exceptions, rather than the rule. Police work is only part of the officers' tasks as they work the area, much like the early years of policing. Their day may begin with a major drug arrest and end with assisting a senior citizen repair a broken furnace. Officers spend much of his or her time on foot, on bicycles, or walking within the community speaking to citizens. In this way, police officers have become more than the unnamed uniform in a squad car. Citizens know his or her P.A.C.T. officer by name and have allowed a strong bond to grow between themselves and police. The success of P.A.C.T. is indicative of the commitment of the community as well as the police.

In February, 1993, Hickory Police Department continued the commitment to Community Policing by forming a committee to study the issue and recommend a plan to implement Community Policing citywide. With city wide department wide community based policing the police department has undergone a major restructuring of both the organization and attitude in delivery of police services. There are six P.A.C.T.'s that operate on the same basis as the original Ridgeview P.A.C.T. Each P.A.C.T. has a commander, supervisor, several patrol officers, and a criminal investigator assigned to provide police services with emphasis on problem solving and customer satisfaction. A police substation has been opened in each P.A.C.T. The substations have enhanced communication within the P.A.C.T.s and have served as another means to reach out to the communities.

P.A.C.T. has developed into an integral part of every community in the city. Officers work under decentralized supervision. This allows the officer to identify and solve problems effectively and efficiently. These officers have evolved out of the traditional law enforcement role. Along with targeted enforcement, officers are involved in all aspects of the community. The officers often serve as a link between the residents of the community, other city, and county public service providers.

Community policing was expanded in January 1996 to include Problem Oriented Policing (POP). POP is a formal method of problem solving which helps in problem identification, tracking, and communication between police and the community.

According to Chief of Police Tom Adkins, "the goals of P.A.C.T. and police department remain the same: to reduce **crime and** the fear of crime, to reduce calls for police services, and to help improve the quality of life for residents and visitors."