

TO BE NICE...OR NOT TO BE...NICE

That is not the question; it is a fine line of action assessed by deputies with compassion and common sense



Photojournalism by Gini McKain

In the Parish of Lafayette, Louisiana, Sergeant Scott Haydel has been put to the test many times during his 33-year career with law enforcement. He will be the first to tell you that it can be a fine line when to be nice to your “client” or not to be nice. Experience will tell you, but more importantly, common sense and an innate ability to know, once you are confronted with a situation.

Since Hurricane Katrina, an influx of all kinds and types of people have come to the predominantly oil influenced city about 120 miles northwest of New Orleans, Louisiana. The additional population, which probably grew more than twenty percent in a matter of months, has created more challenges for the Lafayette Parish Sheriff's Office. Call volume has grown and an increase in drug activity has been documented.

Haydel's service calls have also increased as supervisor of the S.T.A.R. Unit (Sheriff's Team for Advanced Response) from 3pm to 3am, (during the most frequent high-risk calls). The team patrols the worst crime areas of town, section 8 housing, and locations narcotic dealers tend to set root to cause problems. Identify the worst of the worst and suppress the offenses. Each deputy, of the five-man team, has his own take-home vehicle, usually the newest with the most equipment necessary. They patrol together in a pack.

S.T.A.R. is total enforcement and not geared to deal with other issues. The job is crime suppression in areas where there have been spikes in different criminal activity from burglaries, narcotics, open air drug deals, or to stop the crime with an apprehension and arrest. The team works in unison with other law enforcement divisions, like the Sheriff's Office and Lafayette Metro narcotics task force, homicide, and federal agencies related to the suppression.

Typically, S.T.A.R. is dedicated to their own mission set by the supervisor in the unit. “He is out there and his feet are hitting the ground day in and day out. From an administrative standpoint, our policy is hands off. Allow that sergeant to assess the situation in front of him and deal with it. Their efforts are focused on issues at hand. We don't call them away for other calls unless it is a major incident or felony and need to utilize their resources, particularly if they are in the area,” says Uniform Patrol Commander Kip Justice.

EFFECTIVE TOOLS

The pack operation is two fold. One: safety for all the men if the situation becomes violent or dangerous, and two: ease to accomplish their objective to apprehend the suspect or diffuse the circumstances. It is intimidating to see four or five cars with bright lights sequencing, and all aimed at the confrontation. The deputies can initially have more restraint in that kind of situation, rather than be argumentative.

Appearance is an important tool in the arsenal, as well. The team has different colored (navy blue) crisp uniforms, setting them apart from the other patrol deputies. The team has been hand picked for the duty. Offenders have figured out when the team is off duty, resulting in more crime during those hours. Through JAG funds grant, a second team should help alleviate that situation.

Sergeant Haydel has communication with each team member through an earpiece, not just the regular shoulder placed radio. If there is a need to convey a message about a dropped item,