

'The Beat Cop Is Back'

And an Upper West Side Neighborhood Group Couldn't Be Happier

By SUSAN GREENBERG

"The Beat Cop Is Back" reads the sign and people are getting involved. The 24th Precinct and many West Side residents came together Wednesday of last week to discuss neighborhood issues, the role of the community, the police and how they intertwine.

Surprisingly, Victor Riesel, the former labor columnist for the now extinct Daily Mirror was present and apparently caused some waves with his comments — which some there thought were pessimistic; yet Captain John McDermott, the 24th Precinct Assistant Commanding Officer, claimed that Riesel was misunderstood.

For his part, Riesel said the meeting was fantastic. "The community got together and didn't just talk in rhetoric of what should be done, nor did they blame the police" — the cops and the community discussed concrete choices, Riesel said.

Others there ranged from concerned neighbors and cops to people from various service organizations and a New York Times reporter, according to Jill Lashley-Greenbaum, chair of the Police Liaison Group — a newly-formed block association in the lower West

90s— and one of the main organizers of the meeting.

The anti-crime coalition meeting, held at the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation, at 302 West 91st Street, had to be moved from its originally scheduled meeting room to the main sanctuary to allow for the 200 participants, according to Greenbaum.

Greenbaum said she hopes neighbors will develop a relationship with the beat officers and added she hopes children and cops will get to know each other, as it was in the 1940's when cops knew the neighbors, their schedules and their names.

Lashley-Greenbaum said she is particularly concerned about the most vulnerable people in the neighborhood, the children and the elderly. It is important for the elderly to be involved with the community so that they don't feel helpless, Greenbaum said. Getting to know the officers, attending crime-prevention meetings and knowing whom to call if a problem does arise, will help the elderly, as well as the rest of the neighborhood, feel more secure, she added.

Greenbaum said that the Police Liaison Group wants to see the neighborhood form a partnership

with the cops. Residents, she said, need to know what their role is in relation to the cops: neighbors should have an active role, looking out for each other and informing the police of what's going on in the neighborhood. According to McDermott, a main ingredient in effective community policing is neighborhood cooperation. "We need people to get together and give us some direction as to what they see are the biggest problems in the area," McDermott said. "This is the whole idea of community policing."

Community policing was the only option 26 years ago when McDermott began his career. He said that radios were awkward and heavy; the cops "needed friends to get assistance." McDermott said when he was a foot patrol officer in the Bronx and trouble would arise, there were back-up patrol cars. In those days, he said, it wasn't just the cops looking out for the community, it was the community looking out for the cops. McDermott, who said he was thrilled with the turnout at the meeting, noted, "Talking to people is the key to community policing."

He said community policing will be the main focus of the New York

City Police force during the next few years. During the '70s and '80s cops were diverted from their regular beats. Following budget cuts, manpower diminished. Because of the sharp rise in crime, cops were forced to be more mobile, responding mainly to emergencies, no longer being responsible for specific beats. The Community Policing Officers Program, CPOP, began in the 1980s, but, according to McDermott, they didn't have sufficient direction. Yet, "They found that CPOP was a viable program and that one thing that really developed was problem solving . . . getting the community to identify problems and co-operate in solving these problems." Today's community policing evolved from CPOP, according to McDermott. Cops, he said, need to be on foot interacting with the community, and noted the recent L.A. riots didn't materialize in New York mainly because of community policing efforts.

As Lee Brown, the Police Com-

missioner, said at a recent community breakfast honoring Luigi Iocco's new command at the 24th: "If you establish relationships throughout the year, then, when a crisis occurs, you're better able to cope with that crisis." Greenbaum pointed out that in Los Angeles the police use more of a SWAT-like strategy, thus sacrificing community-police relations.

Greenbaum said that she feels the 24th Precinct is malleable and willing to work with the community. The new Commanding Officer there, she said, seems to be very willing to get involved. She said, "Iocco is sensitive to people's needs. . . . He's a listener. What more could you ask for from a captain?" At the breakfast Iocco said he "pledges his efforts to focus on working on neighborhood problems. . . . The citizens' involvement is essential in the fight against crime."

Greenbaum plans to have meetings the last Wednesday of each month with the 24th and members of the Police Liaison Group.

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