

In September of 1997, a frequently divided City Council came together to unanimously approve the consolidation of the City's housing, recreation and senior services into the Police Department to further the outcome most local taxpayers care about – a safer Redlands. This community policing model gained national recognition in 2000 when the City received a \$20,000 award and designation as one of the 25 most innovative and effective governmental programs in America. This prestigious award was given to the City by in the *Innovations in American Government* program sponsored by the Ford Foundation, Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and the Washington, D.C.-based Council for Excellence in American Government.

While housing services were removed from the Police Department during the previous council-mayoral term, the remaining community service components unique to the RPD have remained part of this distinctive community policing model and have flourished. One of those – senior services – has given the department an opportunity to serve the elders of our community in ways that not only enrich their lives but also help members of the RPD find a higher purpose in their public service.

One of our senior services initiatives, *Never Alone*, was borne out of our conversations about how the RPD can be more responsive to our community. I hope it also reflects how each of us would like our community to relate and interact with us in our senior years.

Most seniors have family or friends with whom they spend time and enjoy life. However, a surprisingly significant portion of our community's elders live as shut-ins, alone in a world where they once interacted daily with the rest of society. They live without family, friends or caring neighbors. Some of the saddest cases I've investigated as a Redlands cop are those in which elderly people have passed away – at home alone – only to be discovered weeks later. In this, the greatest of cities, in the greatest of countries, no one should ever die alone, after years of living alone, without the daily reminders that as unique individuals they count in our community.

The first phase of *Never Alone* was the creation of a pool of community volunteers who call senior shut-ins every day to check on them. If they cannot contact them over the phone an officer is dispatched to determine their status. The program's efficacy was proven a few years ago when a volunteer could not contact a 91-year-old participant. An officer was dispatched and found her lying on her living room floor with a broken hip suffered in a fall the day before. Had the volunteer not alerted the Police Department this woman would have surely died.

Today, about 25 seniors take advantage of this program. Daily, they hear that they still count from a pool of 15 caring community volunteers.

As they mature beyond the burden of driving our ever-increasingly congested roads, many seniors rely on others to drive them to medical appointments, grocery shopping and entertainment venues. Most of us take our personal mobility and freedom for granted. But consider how alone you would feel if, after years of driving yourself, you suddenly had no way to get around.

Accordingly, the second phase of *Never Alone* was the creation of a low-cost bus service for seniors left without any other means of transportation. Monday through Friday you can see our buses zipping around town taking seniors to and from their homes, doctor's appointments, grocery shopping or to one of our two senior centers for meals and the social interaction so

important to all of us. Annually, we make more than 5,000 trips with our town's elders, letting them know again, that they're not alone and that they still count!

Our newest addition to the *Never Alone* initiative is *Never Alone: Safely Back Home*, a family-centered and technological approach to helping the families of people with Alzheimer's disease or children with special needs who are given to wandering away.

Alzheimer's is a sad reality for an increasing number of Americans. In a recent Gallop poll, 1 in 10 Americans reported a family member with Alzheimer's and 1 in 3 indicated they knew someone with this sad disease. A significant percentage of those individuals suffer from "wandering syndrome" which causes them to leave home, usually at night, and "wander." This wandering can result in their traveling surprisingly long distances, sometimes with tragic consequences.

One gentleman in town wandered almost 30 times this year in instances in which his wife called the RPD. He wandered many other times but she found him without our assistance. In one instance, he managed to take a bus to the Coachella Valley.

Over the years, the RPD has searched for many, many Alzheimer's patients and in a few instances we were unable to locate them before they died of exposure. When we search for anybody we consider a "critical missing person" the department expends a tremendous number of resources. We will continue to do this, regardless of the cost. Our organizational beliefs will allow us to do nothing less.

Alzheimer's and the wandering syndrome related to this disease and other conditions exact a tremendous toll on caregivers. In the case of Alzheimer's, for instance, caregivers are typically the patients' spouses. They are constantly – and I do mean constantly – focused on the very real possibility of their loved one wandering when they turn their back on them for even a moment. The stress they experience is overwhelming at times and it is not uncommon for them to suffer from stress-related ailments themselves as a result.

We have now created an RPD "special persons registry" that stores a photograph and identifying information for use in case they are reported missing. In addition, we have material and resources that will help caregivers understand the dynamics of the disease and what they can do to minimize its impact. Finally, we will meet with caregivers for a home security assessment to help them better understand what they can do and how we can assist them.

For the last year we have been experimenting with the use of global positioning system (GPS) technology. This is the same technology exploding in the automobile market that allows drivers to follow the directions and map on their GPS device's screen to a desired destination. We have placed GPS ankle bracelets on two 90-year-old gentlemen who have Alzheimer's and wander. This allows us to track their whereabouts almost anywhere in the country. We are currently researching a radio-triangulation system that may be more appropriate for children that don't wander as far.

With this latest addition to our array of services to Redlands we hope to let the families of adults and children who wander know that **THEY** are "never alone" and that their loved ones always, always count in Redlands.

If you know of anyone that might benefit from any component of our *Never Alone* program please contact us at 909.335.4744. Contact me at [chief@redlandspolice.org](mailto:chief@redlandspolice.org).