

# A CLEAR SOLUTION

Lexington Division of Police Lt. Ken Armstrong divulges the purpose and success of the agency's CLEAR Unit

/Abbie Darst, Program Coordinator

Three years ago, a particular Lexington apartment complex plagued the Lexington Division of Police. Calls for service to the location were more than double that of nearby complexes and officer safety was threatened. Cars parked directly in front of the complex made excellent barriers for drug pushers dealing to neighborhood kids and outside addicts. The dilapidated apartment conditions inside posed almost as big an issue as the illegal activity on the graffiti-covered sidewalks out front.

Today, thanks to the efforts of Lexington's CLEAR Unit, calls for service have drastically declined and living conditions for the apartment's tenants have risen considerably. Ken Armstrong, the original lieutenant in charge of the CLEAR Unit has seen many success stories like this in the three years he has orchestrated the out-of-the-box endeavors of the unit and the dedicated officers who serve it.

**What is the CLEAR Unit and how did the concept for it originate?**

CLEAR stands for Community Law Enforcement Action and Response Unit, and the concept or ideology behind the unit originated in the spring of 2006. Then-Chief Anthony Beatty and then-Assistant Chief Ronnie Bastin, who is now our chief, realized that we were having continuing, long-term, historical issues in specific neighborhoods here in Lexington. Those communities were experiencing an inordinate amount of calls for service and part-one crimes compared to their population. After statistically reviewing our crime numbers, we identified target neighborhoods and determined we needed to approach those areas in a two-fold response.

We realized that not only were there crime issues in those areas, but also >>

▶ Former CLEAR Unit Lt. Ken Armstrong stands in front of an apartment complex in Lexington that was once overrun with criminal activity, drug use and distribution. The CLEAR Unit's efforts cleaned up the complex and changed the face of the neighborhood.



/Photo by Elizabeth Thomas



/Photo submitted by Lexington Division of Police

▲ Lexington's CLEAR Unit is primarily geared toward communication and constant interaction within their targeted communities. Using bicycles, CLEAR officers are able to navigate the CLEAR neighborhoods and respond to any incidents or citizen issues.

there were quality-of-life issues, and we knew that we could not separate those two things. So then-Chief Beatty and Assistant Chief Bastin came up with the concept of the CLEAR Unit.

We actually had a unit that existed before called the Neighborhood Officer Program that loosely mirrored what we do with the neighborhood coordinators in the CLEAR Unit, but there was nothing extra to it. There was no other body they worked directly with to get as much coverage as possible. We looked at some other programs in other places and we never really saw that combination of the two efforts. Then, the theory came that if we combined those efforts; specifically outlined what our goals were to the officers, supervisors and commander of the unit; and we were all on board together, that those two different sections within the unit would come together more in a teamwork aspect and be able to accomplish that efficient combination.

What we have done, best we can, is ensure that every day and every night it is the same officers in those neighborhoods. What that does is build a rapport with the community and also it gives those officers a historical understanding of what-

ever the problems in that neighborhood are.

The ideology that goes along with the unit is that we do our best to use problem-oriented policing, community-oriented policing and traditional policing through proactive, directed patrols. We look at not only what the reported problem is, but we also look at what the core of the problem is. What we do is take the extra step to involve the civic agency that needs to be involved. We call code enforcement, the health department, sanitation, streets and roads or whomever it is, to deal with that problem. Especially in the quality-of-life issues, we are doing our best to take that other step.

#### How is the CLEAR Unit organized?

The CLEAR Unit essentially is a unit of officers that are centralized under one lieutenant, but is divided into two different sections within that unit – one being the neighborhood coordinators and the other being the neighborhood response officers. The neighborhood coordinators routinely work during the day addressing crime issues, but they spend the majority of their time dealing with quality-of-life issues. They directly answer citizens' complaints and work with other entities,

both in government and outside government, to address those types of issues. They also work very closely with the neighborhood associations, apartment associations and council members on occasion. We found if we tried this direct line of communication there would be more of a closeness between the officer who is actually dealing with the problem and either the council member or the neighborhood association president. There also would be a lot better response from the citizens because they would feel like they were talking directly to the officer who was dealing with the problem, rather than just someone in the chain of command who did not necessarily understand.

The response officers' primary responsibilities are to do proactive and directed patrols. They do both overt and covert operations. They are assigned to specific neighborhoods and are teamed with one of the coordinators during the day. So, the coordinator during the day gathers as much information as he or she can and then relays it to the officers at night and vice versa. You get more of a concise response to all the issues that pop up, and it is more accurate because it is first hand, rather than third hand, e-mail, Twitter or whatever it would be. Those officers at night also work very closely with the enforcement aspects of our department and with the narcotics unit. If we have a homicide in one of these neighborhoods, or honestly, anywhere in the city, they make themselves immediately available until that issue is resolved.

In addition, contained within the response officers are our gang resource officers. We identified gangs as an area in which we needed some concentrated effort, so we created the gang resource officer program about six months after the CLEAR Unit began. Right now we have three gang resource officers.

There are eight neighborhoods in which we have the CLEAR Unit program. Each one of those neighborhoods has a daytime coordinator and a supervisor, and a sergeant is over those eight individuals. Then at night, we actually have six-day-a-week coverage from our response officers.

Approximately how many officers are assigned to the CLEAR Unit? Does it become a permanent assignment for them or do they participate with the CLEAR Unit in addition to other duties? We have 21 response officers who work at night. They are broken up into three squads. One of the biggest priorities of this unit is to facilitate a divi-

sion-wide effort – so if we know there are problems in one of our neighborhoods that are part of the CLEAR program, we work very closely with the sector commander, shift lieutenants and street officers working those areas too. It is not as though on a Friday night the only people working those neighborhoods are the CLEAR officers. We have beat officers assigned as well. The CLEAR officers are not tied to the radio. In other words they have the freedom and ability to do what needs to be done and not have to be tied to other dispatch calls. Also, we use bicycles every night the weather will allow.

Because we are able to build relationships with the people in these communities both day and night, we are able to get them to do certain programs and get involved more than if every time they called they had to talk to someone different. We get the same response from other city entities. One of the operations that we have is a neighborhood enhancement team, and there are various

“ We do not want bodies, we want solutions to problems, and so whatever they need to do to address the problem, that's what needs to happen. ”

entities within city government that are part of it. We look at specific neighborhoods that have an inordinate amount of quality-of-life issues, then we go out there with entities such as code enforcement and, in a proactive manner, we talk to the home owners. We cite people if they have trash in their yard and those kind of things.

The broken-window theory is one of the things we believe in too. It is an old theory from Herman Goldstein that if you have a car and you park it on the street in pristine condition, it can sit there, but if you come along and break a window out and you come back a week later, the tires will be gone and more windows will be broken out, the hood will be missing and everything like that. So, if you keep things in the best possible condition they can be, it ensures that they will stay that way. But if you let one window get broken, then all heck will break loose, and the whole place will deteriorate. Whenever we are dealing with the quality-of-life issues, that is by far our goal – get the community, >>

>> the neighborhood or the street to the best possible condition it can be and then it will help maintain itself.

Of those communities in which you have CLEAR Unit officers, what percentage of the criminal activity is gang related?

That is a hard question to answer. There is a percentage that is going to be in every neighborhood – it is a citywide issue that we are facing in every neighborhood from the wealthiest to the poorest. I think any answer I give would be purely speculation because in essence, we can tell you how many we know for sure, but how many do we not know for sure? We still have a gang

“The game book we have is not a secret. Really it just boils down to effort and motivation to do it.”

presence that makes itself known and they are engaged in criminal activity. But, luckily overall the percentage of crime committed by them is still very, very low. The key is we are trying to be proactive in addressing the issue in the first place. So by putting the resources forward, we are trying to prevent anything from actually getting to the point where I can sit here and say, ‘Yeah, they are responsible for 5 percent,’ right off the bat. We never want it to come to that. That’s why we spend a lot of time and a significant amount of resources in the prevention, enforcement and education of the gang issue here in the region, not just in Lexington.

What type of activity has been seen or complained of in the concentrated neighborhoods/ areas?

Reportable crime and part-one crime, which is, in essence, the thefts, burglaries, assaults, rapes, whatever it would be, those are what our initial reviews looked into. The non-part-one crimes are also inherently an issue in these areas too. Drug-related crime, which is not a part-one crime – but is a part-two crime – is a big issue in these

neighborhoods. One fuels the other. If you have a lot of drug activity in an area, inherently you have a lot of other crime that is occurring also.

When I said we reviewed part-one crime data and calls for service to designate these areas, there were four factors we looked into the most – the part one-crime, calls for service, citizens’ complaints and historical considerations for those neighborhoods. We did not pick specific neighborhoods to apply the CLEAR program to just based on them having a lot of part-one crimes in one year; it has been a continuation. This program is not here today and gone tomorrow.

How has the unit measured its success during the past three years?

The program has been very successful up to this point. Especially here within our organization, we have seen a lot of positives that have come out of it with reductions in crime in those neighborhoods – significant reduction actually. The average is 8 percent over a two-year time frame, which is very good.

Also, we are inundated with response from other neighborhoods wanting their own CLEAR officer. I think, if tomorrow we had the capabilities to do it, we would easily add four or more neighborhoods because of the effect and the amount of positive feedback both from inside our agency and other government entities, but also from citizens calling in. They will call and say, ‘I’m Janet in Cardinal Valley and I need to speak to my CLEAR officer.’ It is not just, ‘I need to speak to somebody,’ they ask for that person, which is a very good thing. And those officers, who are very motivated and dedicated about getting their job done, feel that connection with them, so they put in extra effort because now it is not answering to a sheet of paper, they are answering to that person and have to call this person back and tell him or her what they have done.

When we started on day one, we only had five neighborhoods. We had five coordinators and six response officers – 11 people. We are up to 30 officers and eight neighborhoods now and that is in less than a three-year time period. So, that should give you some indication that not only does Chief Bastin believe in the program, but the citizens and the community and the rest of the organization believe in it too. Because ultimately, whenever we add people to that unit, someone else has to give up someone, or at least a position. So, command-

ers realize that whenever they give a body up to the CLEAR Unit, they are not losing anything because that body will be working in their sector, they will just working in a different capacity. So, it is a give and take, and up to this point, it has been fantastic. We have received so much positive feedback, and a lot of accolades, letters and phone calls.

How do the shifts work with the 30 members of the CLEAR Unit?

Since we have 21 nighttime response officers, we spread it out over three squads, and so the only day we do not work is Sunday, which is not exactly true. We have worked some Sundays too. The nighttime response officers work predominately from 6 p.m. to 4 a.m. Because of their assignment, they also have a great bit of flexibility, which is key to the unit, to change those to address problems. So if they are getting complaints about drugs in the afternoon at two o’clock, then they change their hours to address the problem. We do not want bodies, we want solutions to problems, and so whatever they need to do to address the problem, that’s what needs to happen.

The day-shift coordinators predominately work 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. You have an hour overlap, which guarantees an exchange of information every day too. They should be running into each other and saying, ‘Hey, I just finished my shift – today we had this, we had this, we have been looking for this guy,’ whatever the circumstances would be.

It is definitely a team approach in each neighborhood. The communication and the teamwork aspect of it are huge – it is important to have that overlap, to see that person and not just leave a little handwritten note.

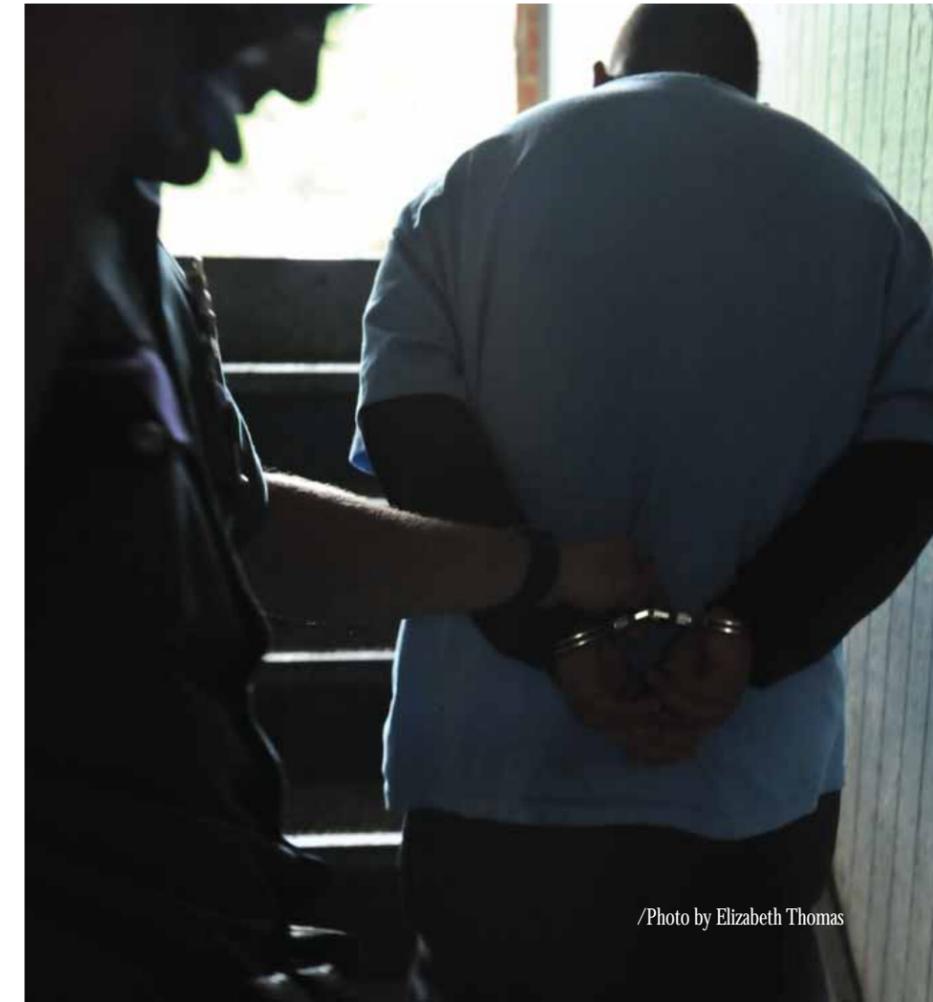
These officers realize that the neighborhoods they are assigned to are their neighborhoods. It is their responsibility. I really do think that when a homicide occurs in one of the neighborhoods to which they are assigned, they take it kind of personally and they want to be the person who catches the suspect. Not because they want the glory, but because they think, ‘How dare you commit this crime in my neighborhood.’ And because of that continuous interaction with citizens, there is a better exchange of information and people feel more comfortable about coming to them. They ultimately can be a huge asset to the robbery/homicide detectives who actually do the investigation.

The things we stress most are teamwork, communication and accountability. But we do not have to stress the accountability much because they take it upon themselves – they understand that.

In that vein, how is an officer chosen or assigned to the CLEAR Unit?

We actually do two different interview processes. Even though it is one unit, the responsibility or skill sets for one aspect of the team and the other are a little bit different. We take into account how they have done around the department over the past couple of years, what training they have had, their education, what interaction we have had with them – if they have come and worked with us on their own – and what specialties they can bring to the unit that will be of assistance. Whenever you diversify and look for different types of people, different experience levels, different ages and different backgrounds before they came on the police department, you get more of a team that can address an effort a lot better. We have some people that are not great at interviewing suspects and we have some that are great at that. >>

▼ An accused Lexington gang member walks to the waiting police cruiser ready to take him back to jail for violating the terms of his release. The suspect, arrested by CLEAR unit officers, had been instructed not to have any contact with other gang members, yet was found armed in an apartment doing drugs with his crew.



/Photo by Elizabeth Thomas

## Under New Management



Lt. Garry Sennett has served the Lexington Division of Police in many capacities

since 1986. His new position as CLEAR Unit lieutenant, which he began in June, pulls from many of his previous assignments and experience. He is a Kentucky Law Enforcement Council-certified law enforcement instructor. Sennett holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Police Administration from Eastern Kentucky University.

### POLICE LIEUTENANT

- June 2009 to Present — CLEAR Unit
- February 2009 to June 2009 – West Sector Patrol
- March 2008 to February 2009 – Bureau of Patrol

### SERGEANT

- 2002 to 2008 – Internal Affairs, Court Liaison
- 1999 to 2002 – Patrol Sergeant
- 1996 to 1999 – Special Assignment Squad

### POLICE OFFICER

- 1992 to 1996 – Narcotics Detective
- 1990 to 1992 – Criminal Patrol Unit
- 1986 to 1990 – Second Shift Patrol

### RECENT CERTIFICATION AND INSTRUCTION EXPERIENCE

- Crisis Intervention Training (2008)
- Kinesic Interviewing and Interrogation, levels I through IV (2007)
- Internal Affairs Investigations (2006)
- Advanced Hostage Negotiations (2005) ■



But the person that might not be great at interviewing suspects may be the perfect guy to go out and find them. So, there are different abilities and because we have that diversity in what we look for in the interview program, you get a better response unit-wide.

The game book we have is not a secret. Really it just boils down to effort and motivation to do it. There is also some give and take. CLEAR officers have to have very flexible hours. They have some of the best assignments and some of the worst assignments. So there is a trade off there too. But I honestly can say that the morale level in that unit is always high. It is a specialized unit, they have been hand picked. They may have earned the position to get in there, but they have to earn it every day, and they do.

We have been very blessed with the officers that we have chosen over the past three years. I am very impressed with their professionalism, dedication and motivation, and I think that resonates throughout the division. I think we present the police department in a positive light no matter what assignment we have. Which is good, especially whenever we are able to build those bridges in the community that may not have existed in the past.

We have a plaque that lists the unit expectations. Those expectations came from the officers, not from us. We asked them, 'What do you expect from your fellow officers, and what do you expect from yourself?' We have 17 expectations hanging up and make sure that not only the people that are here, but also the people that are coming in, agree to those, understand them and already have them in place before they even come here. And if any of those are missing, then they are not going to be considered for the position.

### What has proven the most challenging aspect of this program?

The most challenging aspect of it was getting the message out and getting the right officers involved because it is human nature to not take chances whenever you are happy where you are and enjoy the work you are doing – it is the unknown. So, it took a long time to get out there and explain to people what our goals were, what we were going to be doing, how this was going to work and finding the right people to do it. Right now, I think we have a very good group of individuals. And really, it was just about selecting people that have the right personality, the right motivation and the right ideology that go along

with our group.

### Has the unit's mission changed or been tweaked over the years to more effectively respond to crime/gangs?

The basic operation of CLEAR and the ideology behind it may be tweaked with any new sergeant, lieutenant or commander. But, the overall ideology will most likely stay the same, because the officers, the ones who actually do the work and get the job done, are the ones who established that, and there is an ownership there.

We have been in existence for three years, which in the grand scope of things, is not that long. But the amount of change that has happened in three years is phenomenal. We had 11 officers, now we have 30. We only had five neighborhoods, now we have eight. When we first formed, we were not asked to do specialized details because we did not have enough people; now we are asked to do them all. That metamorphosis into this takes a while to catch up to. As the scope and responsibility of the CLEAR Unit continue to grow, at its core it is always going to be about providing the best possible service to the CLEAR neighborhoods. We may be drawn out to different endeavors at different times, but as soon as that's done, we come right back to our neighborhoods.

We owe former-Chief Beatty and Chief Bastin a lot of gratitude for giving us the opportunity to either succeed or fail in this. But ultimately, the success of the unit is the officers within the unit. It is their dedication and motivation. We tell them where to be and what we expect and just sit back and look at the results. We have been very fortunate with the officers that we have been blessed with. If an officer does not have that buy in or that same ideology that we have posted on the wall, then he or she is not going to be able to work here. We had some people that did not work out, and I think that actually makes the bond in the unit even better. If a person does not have the skills that you think they do and you give them an opportunity and they do not have it and you let them stay, then that lowers the unit expectation. So, you have to remove that problem.

### In your new role in the Narcotics Unit, will you continue to stay involved with the CLEAR Unit?

I was transferred to our Special Investigations Section in June, which includes narcotics, vice, alcohol beverage control, that kind of stuff. The narcotics unit, the vice unit and the ABC unit,

work with the CLEAR Unit pretty much on a daily basis, because the neighborhoods have those issues.

I am going to continue working with it. Being a part of the CLEAR Unit for those three years were the best three years that I have ever had in this organization. In a way, I hated to leave, but with that being said, I knew that the unit was in good hands. The officers run the unit in the fact that they know what needs to be done, and they take care of it. The amount of direction we have to give them is pretty limited.

## CLEAR Unit Sgt. Brian Maynard

### What is the most challenging part for you taking the lead on this program, under Lt. Garry Sennett?

Because there is so much that goes on in this unit with our various assignments, the most immediate challenge is getting everyone, including our new lieutenant and our two new sergeants on board and caught up. One of the sergeants is more diverse in investigations, the other sergeant was in patrol. My background was narcotics, so we each have expertise in certain areas. The next challenge is sharing that expertise and making everyone in our unit diverse. The biggest thing is getting everyone caught up with the activities and special assignments of which we are a part. We cover our neighborhoods, we do a good job with it, but we also take a lot of extra tasks from patrol or for the other units so they can do their jobs.

### Where do you see the CLEAR Unit going in the months and years ahead?

We already have started to get some secondary neighborhoods, so to speak. Our response officers work at night and a lot of the neighborhood meetings that our coordinators go to are at night as well. These secondary neighborhoods are experiencing some of the same issues as some of our primary neighborhoods. Some of our response guys will take the lead and assist those neighborhood associations.

Another aspect of that is by providing officers to these secondary neighborhoods, we ensure we have more than displaced the crime, but that it actually is a reduc-

tion. Displacing crime does not work here, because ultimately we have responsibility for the entire city as an organization. So, if we are able to displace crime out of one neighborhood and it moves to another, we have not reached our goal.

As the manpower becomes available, I also can see additional neighborhoods being picked up, with coordinators and additional response officers. If it keeps going, there could be other responsibilities that will fall under us as well.

The program, up to this point, has been a huge success, and I see it becoming even more so. I do not see a glass ceiling for it, not right now. The only thing that it may come to is simply running out of resources. Every neighborhood in Lexington cannot have a CLEAR officer, but the concepts that we implement through the CLEAR Unit are funneling down to the patrol officers, and they are taking the extra steps because they are seeing that what we do works. J

