



**A** career law enforcement enthusiast, Michael W. Bischoff has served the commonwealth well in

every phase of his career. In his role as the executive director and accreditation program manager for the Kentucky Association of Chiefs of Police, Bischoff has spent countless hours ensuring that law enforcement agencies throughout Kentucky are up to date, protected and professional.

The enthusiasm and drive he put into helping the Fort Thomas Police Department obtain its first accreditation has carried over into helping to accredit or re-accredit more than 75 agencies in the state, and he says the joy and excitement he feels for each agency never gets old. >>

# A VALUABLE RESOURCE

KACP Executive Director **Michael W. Bischoff** walks through the ins and outs of accreditation and other association resources

ABBIE DARST | PROGRAM COORDINATOR

PHOTO BY ELIZABETH THOMAS

**How long have you worked with the Kentucky Association of Chiefs of Police?**

I started working with KACP in 1995 when I was still chief of the Fort Thomas Police Department. We divided the state into areas, and there was another chief that worked the western part, and I took care of the people from the eastern part. After I retired in 1998, I was hired as the accreditation program manager. In 2001, I was hired as the legislative agent or lobbyist for KACP. I have been the executive director about four years now.

**What do you think is the association's most vital aspect to chiefs across the commonwealth?**

We want to be a resource center. A chief can call my office about accreditation, legislative questions, testing materials, the conference or policy and procedure, and they have a quick reference point. We always get back to everybody within at least one day. If I cannot answer their question, I usually know, after being around this long, to whom to refer them.

The main thing is I address the KACP's concerns to the legislative research

committee. They call at least two or three times a day wanting our opinion on bills, and they are so thankful because there is somebody they can call and receive a quick response. Legislatively, we try to keep our membership thoroughly informed about activity. But it means, a lot of times, getting up at 2 or 3 in the morning because they downloaded 100 more bills, and we want it to get out to our members by 8 a.m. I think that's what the job is. If you're going to do the job, you might as well do it right.

Accreditation, naturally, is the topic that gets the most e-mails. We recently held a class at the Department of Criminal Justice Training with 54 participants. Now, for several of months I'm going to get a lot of questions because they cannot absorb everything in one day.

**As executive director of the KACP, what issues and tasks keep you busy day in and day out?**

It depends on the season. When the new legislative session started in January, we got information to our members on what bills were coming up of interest to them.

Then we have the conference coming in August, which takes a lot of preparation. We have accreditation that is almost equal year round, but really gets hectic when it gets close to our conference.

What a lot of people don't understand is it is not just our members we serve. There are other executive directors from across the nation that I am constantly in contact with who are asking me questions or I am putting a question out to the group.

I was one of the charter members of forming what we call ACREDNET, which keeps all the states that have a state accreditation program up-to-date. I receive two to three responses a day with legislative issues, standards and policies.

The Kentucky Association of Counties redeveloped the foot pursuit policy for Kentucky for our standard. We must have received 40 responses on that from across the United States. I felt if I kept going to the State Association of Chiefs of Police meetings and they kept telling us that the No. 1 cause of injury is foot pursuit, then why shouldn't we have a policy on it? So, a lot of people copied ours. We also are one

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of the only states that have OSHA standards in our program.

It would be nice if everybody only called between 8 a.m. and 12 p.m., but I do not feel like I'm doing a decent job unless they can get a hold of me. I've had people call and ask what the noise was in the background. I tell them, 'It is the ocean, I'm walking on the beach.' They say, 'I'll call you back.' Well, no, I tell them to ask me now because it doesn't help them if they have to wait a week. And it does not bother me.

There's somewhat of a joy in being able to help people when they have a problem and don't know where to go. That is what the association is about.

**With more than 75 KACP-accredited agencies across the state, what are some of the biggest transformations you have seen?**

I can go through the whole list of agencies and I can tell you a story about the transformation within each one. Even in my own agency when I first did this, I thought we were one of the better ones, but my eyes were opened as to how far we had to come.

The Louisville Metro Police Department's property room was one of the largest transformations. What it came from to the finished product was almost unbelievable; it was almost picture perfect. Their property room is a property building — it is five or six stories with thousands of weapons, but everything was immaculate. There was one gentleman who was in charge of it, who took it to heart and turned it from something that really needed work into a first-class property system.

Then, to stay in the Louisville area, take an agency like Hurstbourne Acres. When I first visited, it was a one-person department, but the city council members were there. They wanted to know about the program. I explained accreditation is attainable but the department was located in an old house. We spent the majority of a day going through the place and showing them what they needed to do.

The chief's enthusiasm is what really turned it around. They hired another officer right before the final assessment. They updated some things. I mean it benefited them, but the enthusiasm that people have is just unbelievable.

If it is an agency's first time getting accredited, we go to the city council and award a temporary certificate. In a lot of places, everybody is there. It is a big thing, and rightfully so. They have pulled themselves up to where they meet or exceed national standards for a police department and that says a lot; and it is not easy.

Almost every agency has issues with property rooms. In Kentucky, we are notorious for it. I don't know why, but in Kentucky we have more federal agents and state police going in and seizing property rooms and chiefs and sheriffs getting fired over them. So, we hit very hard on property rooms, but when they are done, they are so proud of it.

Sheriffs' offices are a unique animal because they are elected officials so they want to be as open as possible. Yes, you can be open to the public and still protect your employees.

We look for improvement each time an agency goes through accreditation. Once you go through the first time, we expect there is going to be some type of other improvement. Often, re-accreditation the first time is harder than the initial accreditation because a lot of times you can get by with some things. Say an agency has never done performance evaluations, but to meet the standard, the agency now has the packet and the instructions, they have trained their people, and are going to start doing them. When we come back, we're going to see whether or not they have done those. Plus, let's say you have a property room and you have three property room managers. In five years, all of them change and no one passed on everything — you never get everything. So, when you are there, they ask how did we pass the first time? Things change — legislatively things change.

It is little things, like the safe infant hand off. It was surprising to me how many did not catch it. A woman, within 72 hours of giving birth, can hand over her child to a police officer. The officer is not allowed to ask her anything, and if he or >>





During the University of Kentucky Police Department's on-site visit, Michael Bischoff talks to communications Supervisor Brandon Combs about the communication policies UKPD has in place. Talking to department personnel, like communications Officer John Shawback (center), is just one part of the accreditation assessment process.

she does, there will be a huge liability issue. What if she takes the baby back and then throws it in a dumpster? It has always been that a woman could take a baby to the hospital, but they added peace officers to it. We thought it was necessary that everybody be aware of this. If your officer does not know and starts asking her name and all this stuff, you've just blown it.

These are things that will get you in trouble. If you look at our mission, it is liability and professionalism.

One of my passions of accreditation is response-type driving — when officers are responding to a call. Everybody that has ever worked with me knows that. I compare lights and sirens to a chainsaw. It can be a very useful tool. It also can be very dangerous if it is used incorrectly. It is so difficult to change that mentality. We need to watch response modes. In pursuits, you are probably going to get sued if you get in an accident, but it usually is dictated by a perpetrator. However, a response mode is strictly the officer. He or she is making the decision and unfortunately Kentucky is one of a few states in the whole nation that says "due care." So basically, if something goes wrong, you did not use "due care." It does not say "recklessly" like most, it says "due care." And you cannot find hardly anybody that is going to change that.

#### What advice would you give for agencies that maybe don't see accreditation as something they can obtain?

What we tell them when we do the training is, there are 167 standards, if you take just three a week — which is not hard to do, you would be done in a year. If you look at it that way, it does not seem so insurmountable. Also, we do not require that all of a sudden your police department has to be Home and Garden. You can make shelving, you can make your own extra measures of security that you need in property rooms and so forth, as long as it meets the standard. We're not looking for it to be a \$5,000 evidence-transfer station. There are some agencies that can do that. But, it does get down to crunch time when you have to devote some resources to it, or else you never get over that last hump.

Then people talk about cost. There are so many different things to help in that area. It has been ruled that forfeiture money now can be used for accreditation. Several insurance companies, including KLC, offer grants to assist with accreditation.

The other thing is that agencies usually make money off of this. Ashland, I believe, saved enough money on their insurance that they could buy a cruiser — about \$18,000. So, it is benefiting them — that is what the city mayor and city council like to hear. Say you pay \$2,000, but you save \$500 or \$1,000 a year on insurance, you are going to make money off this.

If we have a one-person department, we will work with it because it will be very simple. If we go in and he has one office and one closet and that's about all, no, we are not going to charge him the \$2,000. But I still have to spend the same amount of work as I do even with a larger agency. I think people forget how much work there is involved on our part to certify them.

So even if it is \$2,000, it is good for five years, so it breaks down to \$400 a year — it is cheap.

#### What are your goals for the association over the next few years?

We want the committees to have more input into where we want to go. That is the way we feel the association should be run.

One thing I am very proud of is that Chief Tom Szurlinski of Florence Police Department and I have been working for a long time on our foundation and we

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received the final approval. Now we have the Kentucky Association of Chiefs of Police Foundation. They are two separate entities. The foundation is a 501(c)3 organization.

We got out of telemarketing a number of years ago. I did not particularly like it and then the economy tanked and we mutually agreed to get out. Well, that took about half our budget. I had to cut some things, and most of what I cut were things like regional funding and scholarships. It took Tom and me two years to get the foundation finally through the IRS, but once we get it up and running, it is going to give back toward regional funding for executive development and to scholarships. Also, if an officer is killed, we have a certain amount of money that we can give to the family right away.

We need to take stronger looks at adding more for the buck. If it is reaching out to the new chiefs and letting them know what we have to offer — that is in membership. If it is in accreditation — making sure our prices stay the same. If it is in professional standards — making sure that we post every new standard that needs to be met onto the Web site.

We can provide these things without spending a lot of money. We are not a rich association. It is a labor of love. I have never seen anything that accomplishes so much so quickly and efficiently or else I would not have devoted so much of my life to this program.

#### Before coming to KACP, where did you work and what did you do?

I worked at a grocery store and worked my way up to assistant manager. I was trying to go to night classes at the time, and I was working 60 hours a week. I knew the Fort Thomas chief at the time. He approached me because they were looking for college-educated people. That was back in the early 1970s when they came out with an initiative to hire a more professional, educated police officer.

The other thing that I did for more than 20 years was serve as a certified polygraphist.

I started the polygraph and pre-employment programs in northern Kentucky and probably administered about 3,500 examinations.

I met a lot of interesting people and it was one of the better things we did. It bettered the quality of the applicant pool. But it is interesting and I love the idea of interviewing people. People are very interesting.

It works with this. I know people and have friends from all four corners of the state. We have people accredited in Ashland and Paducah and all over northern Kentucky and London. That is the fun part.

#### What has been the biggest highlight of your career?

I think I may have to take it down in phases, because there have been too many changes. I came on as a recruit at Fort Thomas in 1969 and retired in 1998. I knew the day I became a patrolman that I wanted to be chief. I was one of those goofy kids who said, 'I'm going to be chief one day,' and it stuck. So becoming chief was a highlight for that phase.

I was honored to receive the Governor's Award for Outstanding Leadership in 2008. It meant to me that what we were doing was correct, that people recognized our program and they felt it was worthy of that by awarding it to me.

To be absolutely honest, the one thing I think about for this question is the joy I get when I get to tell an agency that for the very first time they are going to be accredited — it makes me feel unbelievable. The joy I see in the agency, the hard work they put into it — and for some it is a tremendous amount of work to get to where they are when we tell them that. And to have the honor of being able to tell them that we are going to nominate them for their first five-year certificate, that, to me, says we did our job right. And that gets to be repeated over and over, so it is not just one single thing. I'm happy for a couple days afterward — they made it.

They always say that you can accomplish a lot more if you do not try to take the credit for something, and that is what we try to do — the credit is all theirs. J

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