

## Riverdale celebrates its police officers

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Members of the Riverdale Police Department, including a police dog in training, Elza who is a 2-and-half-year-old Belgian malinois, pose for a photograph after an event designed to show appreciation for local police at the senior community center in Riverdale on Monday, Oct. 19. Riverdale Police Lt. James MacIntosh speaks at the senior community center in Riverdale on Monday, Oct. 19 at an event designed to show appreciation for local police.

Riverdale residents, police, and a congressional representative gathered at the senior community center last Monday to celebrate local police officers.

The hour-long event featured formal speakers before some members of the audience shared positive personal stories of their experiences with local cops. Some in the audience were family members of police and borough employees, however, their show of support for local police was quite genuine. One resident was nearly moved to tears in talking about her positive encounters with Riverdale police officers.

The unidentified attendee said local police "responded quickly" and with "small town compassion" during the five years her elderly father lived with her and experienced deteriorating health before dying on Mother's Day.

"Not only did you guys respond, but I witnessed you kneeling there, holding my dad's hand just talking with such compassion and respect to him," she said.

The evening began with comments from Riverdale Mayor William Budesheim who discussed the importance of having a local Police Department as the foundation for freedom. He introduced Chris Scilingo, a Riverdale resident, Marine and current policeman in Palisades Park.

Scilingo described the event as "Support Your Local Police and Keep them Independent," and said it was sponsored by the local chapters of The John Birch Society. He then introduced James Fitzgerald, the national director of field activities of the John Birch Society who spoke on the topic. Fitzgerald spoke for about 10 minutes about the safety of police officers, and discussed news events and their impact on law enforcement officers.

"There is absolutely no other profession I can think of, outside of perhaps the United States military, where families live in fear that the



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individual who went to work that day may not come home or may come home injured," he said. "But unfortunately that's what's been happening in the last year or so in this country with law enforcement. It's not been a good year for police officers. We've had riots in Ferguson, Baltimore, Cleveland, and New York."

He said in the last 10 years 1,641 police officers died on the job, "and yet the very next day by the tens of thousands those police officers put on that uniform and go to work."

Anthony Alvarez, a representative of Congressman Rodney P. Frelinghuysen, spoke next. He said, "We should never let a day go by where we fail to acknowledge, encourage and honor the service of the men and woman of law enforcement. These are the courageous people who run towards the sound of trouble and danger when members of the general public run the other way. Just like members of our Armed Forces who protect us overseas, our neighborhoods are sustained by an invaluable network of police who protect our communities and each and every one of us."

Riverdale Councilman Garrett Astarita read a statement of support for Police Appreciation Day in Riverdale from state Sen. Kevin J. O'Toole, who was not in attendance.

Riverdale Police Lt. James MacIntosh also spoke and he introduced the police officers who were at the event along with the police dog currently in training for narcotics detection. He shared the police arrest statistics for the year up to Oct. 15:

n 5,075 traffic stops with 3,942 summonses issued

n 51 DWI arrests

n 61 shoplifting arrests

n 6 for assault arrests

n 19 drugs arrests

n 4 resisting arrest

n 72 warrant arrests

n 6 death investigations

n 258 ambulance requests

n 371 MVA accidents

n 14 domestic disputes

"I've never had in this time that I've been here a better group of dedicated individuals than we do have right here," MacIntosh said. "I want to thank you guys for doing the job you're doing."

MacIntosh is the longest currently serving member of the Riverdale Police Department. He said much has changed since he began working for the Riverdale Police Department in 1995. He said it was much different law enforcement in a different era with just one officer on the road.

"It was, some would say safer," he said. "I don't know if it was safer but it was just different. It was a small town. We've tried to keep it a small town. I think Riverdale is a beautiful little town. Everybody here is neighborly, friendly. We've tried to police it that way. Not just be law enforcement but serve the community. That's what we try. That's what we preach. And I think every single one of these officers buys into that. Half of it is because most of these officers are local. They have a invested interest in this town."

MacIntosh said that when he started working with the department there were no box stores like Wal-Mart or Home Depot.

"I've watched this town transform," he continued. "(Interstate) 287 had just opened up when I started. Now we have interstate traffic. We have Wal-Marts, we have Home Depots. We have all that. We've had to change but yet try to keep serving the community as best we can. I hope we're doing a good job for you. I hope you appreciate it."

He said that his door is always open to the public along with that of the chief's and that residents should feel free to stop in.

Several residents, including the mayor, shared personal stories about how police officers have impacted them or family members in a positive way.

Budesheim said that a police officer in Pompton Lakes, Lt. Ron Thomas, most definitely saved his father's life with a quick response and the use of a defibrillator.

Others spoke about how the police impact the community in a positive way with programs like the Junior Police Academy and those in the local schools.

"They teach our children the respect of the law and the good way to look at things from the opposite side because unfortunately...there is a lot of negativity out there and kids are learning," one audience member said. "They see what's online, what's on TV. There's too much negativity but these guys show a positive response and for one, I've been very grateful for that."

The Fire Department was also acknowledged at the end of the event, and Budesheim suggested a similar event be held for local firefighters and First Aid Squad members.

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