

Civic Solutions

I was pleased to see the letter to the editor on civil defense by Lawrence Martines ("Citizen Participation," May), and I wanted to share the story of our similar efforts in Las Vegas to support homeland security.

For months after 9-11, retired law enforcement officers asked what they could do to assist in protecting the homeland. The dream of creating an all Volunteer Homeland Reserve Unit consisting of retired law enforcement officers from local, state, and federal agencies came to fruition in December 2002 here in Las Vegas. I believe this to be the first active Volunteer Homeland Reserve Unit (VHRU) consisting of all former law enforcement officers in the country.

In order to organize the hundreds, if not thousands, of retired law enforcement officers living in Las Vegas, a coalition of police organizations was created (The Nevada Police Coalition of Police Organizations, Active and Retired Law Enforcement Officers), which now consists of twelve police organizations. This coalition undertook the task of forming the VHRU.

Through the VHRU, these retired officers would be available to assist our four police departments—the Las Vegas Metropolitan, Henderson, North Las Vegas, and Boulder City police departments—in a time of crisis, whether caused by a terrorist act or other event, such as a major power outage, serious flood, or a train derailment of toxic material. The group would, for example, be able to assist the police in the evacuation of citizens living near the incident.

A coordinator, team leaders, and squad leaders were identified from the volunteers to be the core leadership. These core leaders are responsible for organizing their units within the VHRU.

In addition, the City of Las Vegas was divided into four areas: North West, North East, South West, and South East. Volunteers who join the VHRU are assigned to teams based on the area in the city where they reside. Recently, we added a Boulder City VHRU team and a Laughlin VHRU team. Our total volunteer force numbers over 100 indi-

viduals who have a tremendous amount of talent and expertise.

Most of these volunteers are licensed to carry a concealed weapon if needed. The volunteer group will be unarmed, but if a situation warrants firearms, we are able to respond.

A notification process has also been established. In each of the four police agencies that might be requesting VHRU assistance, a police coordinator has been identified and knows how to contact the VHRU coordinator. If assistance is requested, the VHRU coordinator notifies the six team leaders, who in turn inform the eight squad leaders. The squad leaders will be responsible for notifying the volunteers in their teams if they need to respond to a specific incident. The VHRU is exploring electronic communication tools to notify everyone via phone by the use of a computer with special software designed for this use.

Each VHRU member is equipped with a police-issued reflector vest to be worn over their outer garment. Each volunteer also has a hat and flashlight in the event of night activation and search.

The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, under the federal Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) "Volunteers to Police Services" program, has submitted a request for federal funding to help support the volunteers with equipment, training, and other needs.

This type of group is beneficial in that it needs little or no formal training, is supported by local police agencies, is well organized, and can respond to an event quickly since most of the volunteers reside in the cities of Las Vegas and Henderson. The coalition has launched its own Web site (www.nevadapolicecoalition.org) to keep the member organizations current. As part of that site, there is a page dedicated to the VHRU, with a link to an online application as well as a printable one for any retired law enforcement officer wishing to join our ranks. In the near future, the VHRU will launch its own Web site to keep the volunteers updated on events and training schedules. We have also offered advice when we have been approached by other states that are interested in creating their own VHRU of former law enforcement officers.

THEODORE V. FARACE
Coordinator
Volunteer Homeland Reserve Unit
Las Vegas, Nevada