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**POLICE DEPARTMENT**

*An International Accredited Law Enforcement Agency*

July 13, 1995

**John Lusardi**

*Police Executive Research Forum*

1120 Connecticut Ave. NW

Suite 930

Washington, D.C. 20037

**Dear Mr. Lusardi:**

It is with pride that I offer the enclosed project as a candidate for the *Herman Goldstein Excellence in Problem-Solving Award*. I have chosen to include a project that was truly a team effort and cannot be credited to just one individual. I believe that the true spirit in Community-Based Policing rests in partnerships, and this effort crossed lines within the Scottsdale Police Department as well as in the community of Scottsdale. I believe it captures the importance of taking what appears to be a very negative political incident and turning it into an opportunity to enhance the relationship of the law enforcement community and the public we serve.

Sincerely,



**Douglas L. Bartosh**  
Executive Assistant Chief of Police

**SCOTTSDALE POLICE DEPARTMENT**

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*Excellence Initiative Integrity*

The Scottsdale Police Department has been aggressively adopting *Community-Based* policing strategies for the past 5 years. At the heart of Scottsdale's CBP philosophy is the recognition that Department efforts center on the patrol officer whose time needs to be spent on activities that prevent crime from occurring as much as possible. One major strategy currently employed by the Uniformed Services Division is to encourage officers to establish personal relationships with citizens who work or live within their work area. With this basis in mind, the Scottsdale Police Department offers this example of a team problem solving effort for consideration for the *Herman Goldstein Excellence in Problem-Solving Award*.

Maricopa County, whose county seat is Phoenix, found itself deeply in red ink as it approached the end of fiscal year 1993-1994. Department heads were ordered to significantly trim their budgets. In the case of the Maricopa County Attorney's office, whose budget exceeded \$29 million, the County Attorney decided to eliminate his Check Enforcement Bureau hoping to save \$500,000 per year.

This unit was established to investigate and prosecute violators who passed bad checks under the amount of \$500. The Check Enforcement Bureau was receiving approximately 6,000 bad checks per month and had a backlog of 26,000 checks from various valley agencies awaiting prosecution, when the decision was made to eliminate the Bureau.

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Area police departments were notified on May 21, 1994, that the Bureau would be closed on May 30, and the 26,000 back-logged checks would be returned to the concerned victim-business to be investigated by the responsible police agency and prosecuted in their misdemeanor courts. Local prosecutors were already over-burdened with caseloads and quickly determined that it would be impossible to deal with this back-log without additional staffing. In Scottsdale's case, the City Prosecutor was 6 months behind in reviewing reports of misdemeanor crimes for possible prosecution.

Several ideas for continuing to handle the workload were explored with the City Prosecutor. In every case hidden costs were uncovered, and there appeared to be no way to continue to prosecute "small-time offenders" within the adopted budget.

Detectives from various valley agencies charged with investigating these crimes met to "brain-storm" ways to deal with the problem. Each agency found itself in similar circumstances, unable to investigate the County back-log and unable to add staffing to deal with future cases. They agreed that area merchants would be advised to take all bad checks in amounts under \$1,000 to civil court for litigation.

The media quickly publicized the dilemma that the merchants were facing. All law enforcement began to receive criticism for its apparent inability to deal with the problem.

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The Scottsdale Police Department saw an opportunity for patrol officers to meet and discuss the issue with merchants within their work areas, and at the same time talk about prevention before the merchants became victims and became emotionally involved.

A packet of information was developed by the Check/Fraud Unit for victims of bad checks whose crimes met certain criteria. Victims were advised how to proceed with a civil action or where appropriate, prosecution.

Contact was made with the Chamber of Commerce, to discuss the issue, the Department's strategy and to see what the Chamber's response would be. A follow-up letter to the Chamber outlining the discussion formalized the Department's plan.

A fraud detective who was involved in the development of the Department's strategy was asked to script and produce a video tape that would be shown to patrol officers discussing the situation. He decided to enact a "right and a wrong way" for a beat officer to approach his merchants. (This tape which is included was a hit with the officers at their briefing sessions.) In addition to discussing the situation and stressing the importance of reviewing the merchant's policy on accepting checks as payment, the officers presented each merchant with a letter from the Chief of Police that reviewed the policy decision.

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Officers who work patrol in Scottsdale are divided into teams assigned to work areas. District commanders prepared books containing a beat map divided into subzones and blank subzone forms for each work area. The books were kept in the officers' beat baskets so they could be taken into the field each day. Over the next several months. Officers were asked to contact each merchant in their work area and log them on the forms.

This proved to be a highly successful strategy. By in large, the vast majority of merchants contacted were very positive in their comments about the Department's efforts. Many businesses have opted to no longer accept checks for payment. Many who continue to do so, are requiring better forms of identification. Complaints about the inability to prosecute offenders are extremely low. In fact this strategy seemed to quickly defuse the issue.

The new budget year has found the County in better financial condition. The County Attorney's office is planning on reinstating its Check Enforcement Bureau and revising its policies on prosecution as we approach election year.

As the public continues to demand that government do more with less, police agencies will be expected to lead the way into the next century. In this case, the Scottsdale Police Department found a way to deal with a highly publicized emotional issue to the satisfaction of its citizens demonstrating the effectiveness of *Community Based Policing* strategies.

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Officers Involved in Developing this Effort:

Detective Robert Hill #298

Sgt. Tom Hill #181

Lt. Anthony Markos #309

Capt. Page Decker #182

Deputy Chief Dee Taylor #212

Beat Officers of the Scottsdale Police Department

Attachments:

A-Memorandum to Officers

B-Victim Packet

C-Letter to Chamber of Commerce

D-Letter to Merchant

E-Newspaper Articles.