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OPERATIONS

Private Financing for “Sting” Operations

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"Over the years, the Rockford Police Department has spent considerable time developing trust between business, industry, and the total community. It is imperative that this trust exist for a venture of this type to succeed."

Federal monies for special fencing operations ("sting" programs) are being phased out. Therefore, it is imperative that police agencies seek other sources for these projects, such as private organizations.

The Rockford Police Department secured funds from a civic group to open the first privately financed fencing operation in the country. In the past, the practice was to obtain money for fencing operations from the Federal Government, i.e., the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. The opening of the fencing store in Rockford, Ill., known as the New Avon Swap Shop, eliminated a lot of "red tape," and just as important, fostered a spirit of citizen-police cooperation.

A study conducted in Rockford by the police department's Intelligence Division determined that there was a considerable amount of stolen property being sold within the city. During the study, arrests were being made as cases could be proved against persons in possession of stolen property. However, investigations of stolen property cases were limited due to the city's financial plight.

The Youth and Community Services Bureau decided to contact a private organization with the idea of setting up an "operation." However, it was realized that if the nature of the program were known by all the club members, there could be a possibility of compromising the program.

Contact was made with officers of the three local Kiwanis Clubs, who agreed to ask the club membership for funds. But all the club officers would explain to the members was a police need for an antiburglary program.

The Kiwanis officers went back to their respective clubs and within 2 months had a total pledge of \$7,900. The trust relationship shown by the Kiwanis for the Rockford Police Department was enormous. Also important was the fact that the money came from a pri-

ivate organization to the police with very little evidence of its purpose. Over the years, the Rockford Police Department has spent considerable time developing trust between business, industry, and the total community. It is imperative that this trust exist for a venture of this type to succeed.

Two months were devoted to plans setting up the operation. Personnel and equipment were selected and obtained. After deciding that the location for the operation should be in an area with a relatively high crime rate, an area in the old downtown section was selected, also desirable because of the high rate of local traffic passing through.

Once selected, the store had to be remodeled before opening for business, a task assigned to police officers in order to keep costs down and ensure the security of the operation. Personnel chosen for the operation were a State police detective and one of the police department's intelligence detectives. The State officer was to work behind the counter, as he wouldn't be readily identified by local criminals; the intelligence officer remained concealed in a back room to act as backup and to photograph the customers for later identification.

The swap shop was officially opened for business on February 18, 1977, with the first "customer" arriving 3 days later. Business was very slow for the first 4½ weeks, so slow that terminating the operation was discussed. In time, however, business did pick up considerably, and 2 months after its opening, the swap shop was closed, as all the funds given the department had been spent.

During the fencing operation, it was found that stolen property was often brought in before the burglary had even been reported to the police. Not having reports of stolen property, the officers had a difficult time determining what to buy.

During the first 2 weeks, the operation was checked

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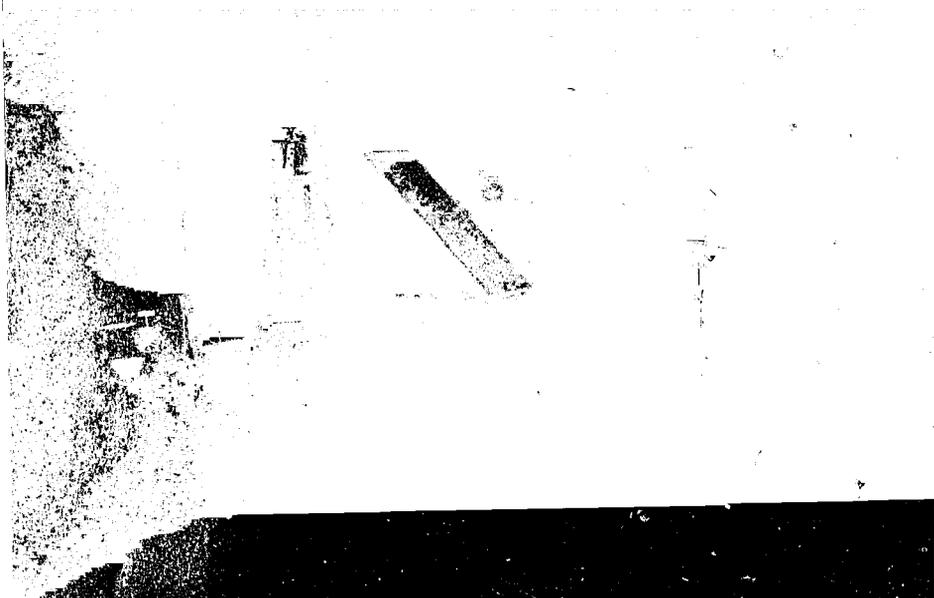
out by other “fences.” One of the fences came in and accused the officers of being the police. After he finished bluffing, he explained just how to set up a good fencing operation. Once a burglar attempted to sell a stolen clock radio, and a uniformed police officer walked into the store. Needless to say, the “business transaction” was halted.

In early May, officers testified before the grand jury, and 27 indictments, ranging from burglary to possession of stolen property, were handed down on identified suspects. The following day, beginning at 5 a.m., arrest teams were organized, briefed, and sent out to

make the apprehensions; by 4 p.m., all but one suspect were in custody.

As a result of the project, over \$50,000 worth of property was recovered—television sets, radios, cameras, and even a couple of sawed-off shotguns.

In addition to the property recovered, 36 burglaries and thefts were solved immediately. Later, another defendant cleared 37 burglaries. For an initial investment of \$7,900, the arrests and property recovered could be considered to be a good investment. Also, some of the unclaimed property was sold at public auction authorized by the Rockford City Council, and approximately



**Interior of the New Avon Swap Shop.
Suspects were photographed through
openings in the paneling.**



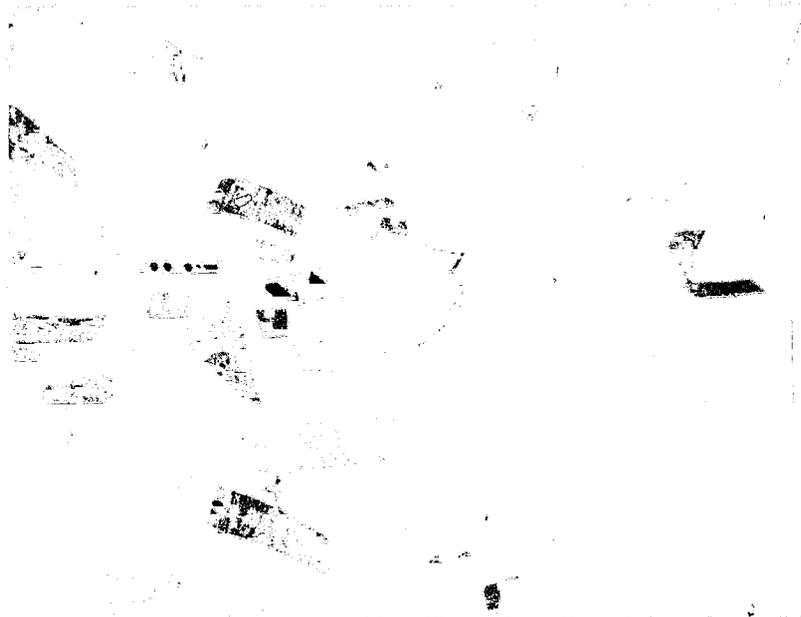
Chief Delbert E. Peterson

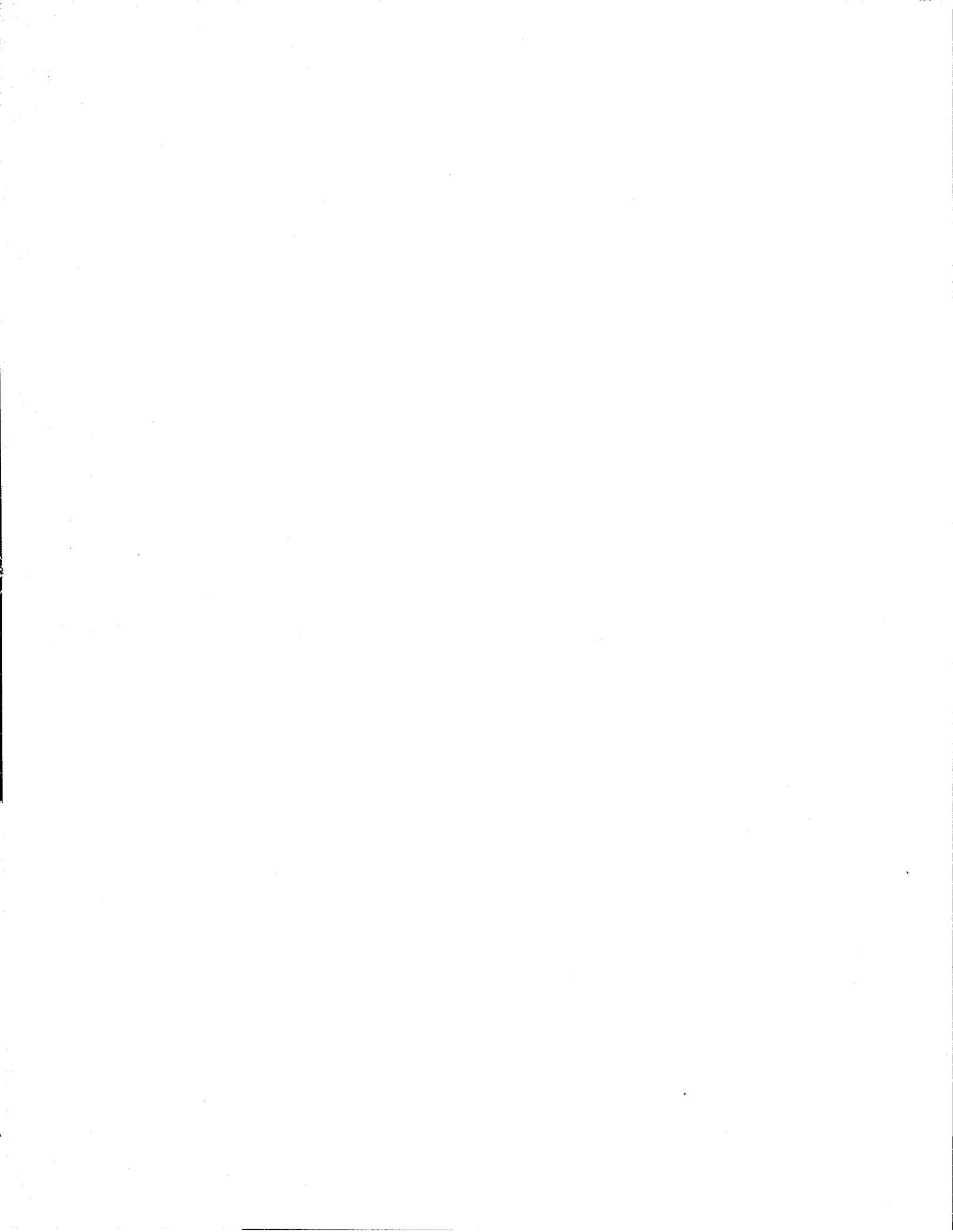
\$3,000 was returned to the Kiwanis Clubs!

An important aspect of the program was police and civic leaders' cooperation for the improvement of the community. Such cooperation has to be a distinct deterrent to criminal activity. Locally, it was thought that when using Federal funds, a department may become overly dependent on the Federal Government and not involve local civic leaders in special police projects. When a person is involved in a project or problem, he lends more support toward its solution. Consequently, the police and the individuals within the community benefit by having private agencies finance fencing operations; it sets the stage for further cooperation.

What happened to those arrested? Most chose to plead guilty, even though it meant prison time. Those choosing to go to trial have been found guilty. One of the suspects complained to the front man on the day of his arrest, "Man, what did you do to me? I brought you my whole gang, man, my whole gang." ®

Stolen items recovered during the fencing operation.





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