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OPERATIONS

# The Seattle Police Special Activities Section:

## How to Provide Maximum Police Service at Minimum Cost

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Police departments across the country are faced with increased budgetary restrictions that not only prohibit them from increasing the size of their departments, but stretch existing manpower and resources to the breaking point. In metropolitan areas, this situation is resulting in the increased use of one-man patrol cars to compensate for the lack of personnel. When this problem is combined with an inadequate number of police officers in a given city, then unique solutions must be found.

Photos pages 16, 17, 19 by Jerry Gay



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The Seattle Police Department's Special Activities Section (SAS) must often provide in excess of 250 police officers to make up a security force for everything from rock concerts to professional sporting events. The department consists of approximately 1,000 sworn officers. Six hundred and fifty of them are assigned to the uniformed Patrol Bureau and Traffic Division to cover the entire 84-square miles of Seattle for a 24-hour period. There are not 250 officers to spare for such security forces.

The SAS is headquartered at Seattle Center, a complex of cultural, entertainment, and convention facilities covering 74 acres—1 mile by monorail from the heart of the central business district. The complex consists of many facilities but of foremost importance is the metropolitan stadium and 3 auditorium-type facilities which can accommodate from 3,000 to 15,000 patrons. It is in these facilities that the biggest events are held which require the heaviest police coverage.

The Center is the reason for the unit's existence, having been originally built on the site of the 1962 World's Fair. Realizing the potential benefit of maintaining such a complex in the downtown area, city government decided to retain it as a permanent site.

While the Center was being converted to a permanent fixture, it was policed by the occasional patrolling of units assigned to the adjacent area. But patronage of the completed facility would depend, to a large extent, on a feeling of security by people who used the complex or attended events presented there. Periodic patrol and policing on a “call-for-service” basis would be inadequate.

The first regular assignment of police personnel to the Center was made in 1965. One result was that more promoters and sponsors became interested in holding events there, with the subsequent attraction of large numbers of people. This large concentration of people in such a relatively small area made it obvious that the detachment at the Center should be made permanent. The end result, after 13 years of changing needs and manpower requirements, is the present SAS consisting of 13 sworn officers (15 in the summer), 2 sergeants, and a lieutenant. These officers operate on 2 shifts; one from 1000 to 1800 hours and the other from 1800 to 0200 hours.

SAS's responsibilities are many and varied but one of their most important functions, from a police point of view, is providing security at the Center's events. Obviously, 13 officers cannot provide this security at an

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event with an attendance of 15,000, particularly if that event is an extremely popular rock group whose patrons bring with them the inherent problem of liquor and drugs in addition to the sheer weight of numbers.

How then does such a small unit perform the job that is expected of it? The unit commander maintains an accurate, up-to-date list of all officers interested in off-duty employment and provides the necessary security with those men. It sometimes requires a great deal of manipulation to provide enough officers.

Whenever a promoter has a show scheduled, he contacts SAS with the particular requirements for security and crowd control for the event. Together they discuss the particular characteristics of the event and determine how many officers will be needed. From the off-duty roster the SAS lieutenant assigns the necessary manpower, computes the cost, and bills the promoter. The promoter makes direct payment for services to a private C.P.A. firm, including an additional fee the firm charges for its service. The C.P.A. firm, in turn, makes payment of wages to the officers. In this way the police department avoids the questionable practice of becoming involved in handling monies paid to off-duty officers working for someone other than the police department.

The important point is that most events require a police presence, a fact acknowledged by everyone from the police to promoters; but no matter how police coverage is provided the event will probably be staged. By using this method just described, more than one objective is accomplished. The

event proceeds smoothly because police are present to maintain order; the promoter is favorably impressed and uses the facility again, thereby contributing to the Center's financial stability; but, most important, a necessary function has been fulfilled by official police department authorities at relatively low cost to the city. When one considers that SAS repeats this procedure 35 to 40 times a year for rock concerts alone, the impact on the police budget would be tremendous if the city had to pay overtime to these extra officers.

The savings to the department created by SAS does not stop here, for the unit has complete administrative responsibility for recruitment, training, appointment, and assignment of the members of the Seattle Police Reserve Unit and the Seattle Police Explorer Post.

The reserve unit is a volunteer, nonpaid service organization whose officers, when on duty, work under the direct supervision of a regular sworn officer. Reserve officers are chosen carefully and must attend the Seattle Police Academy for 120 hours of classroom training covering most areas of police work. Once they receive their full police commissions, the same as sworn officers, they are required to work a minimum of two 8-hour shifts every month. This 70-member force provides an invaluable service to the department in general and SAS specifically. The only cost incurred by the department is the issuance of uniforms and equipment.

These reserve officers facilitate an orderly ingress and egress to and from the immediate Seattle Center area. Their acquaintance with this

duty and familiarity with the many events and attendant problems enables them to perform this function efficiently, thus relieving the department's Traffic Division of this burdensome task.

They fulfill the SAS's responsibility for moving traffic through the main Seattle Center parking garage, and after years of practice can usually accomplish this task in a little over 30 minutes. During rock concerts and other major events, they patrol the garage continually and normally write 15 to 20 citations for minor infractions of the law. This constant surveillance prevents minor thefts and acts of vandalism and ensures the place does not become, essentially, the site of a large party. Furthermore, the officers use the citation in lieu of arrest, whenever possible, because of the great number of juveniles and minors involved in this activity.

Reserve officers' duties are not limited solely to traffic control at the Center. SAS schedules these officers to augment the regular patrol force, driving the paddy wagon, filling in for vacationing officers to create two-man cars, etc. They act in these capacities as sworn officers, again at no cost to the city.

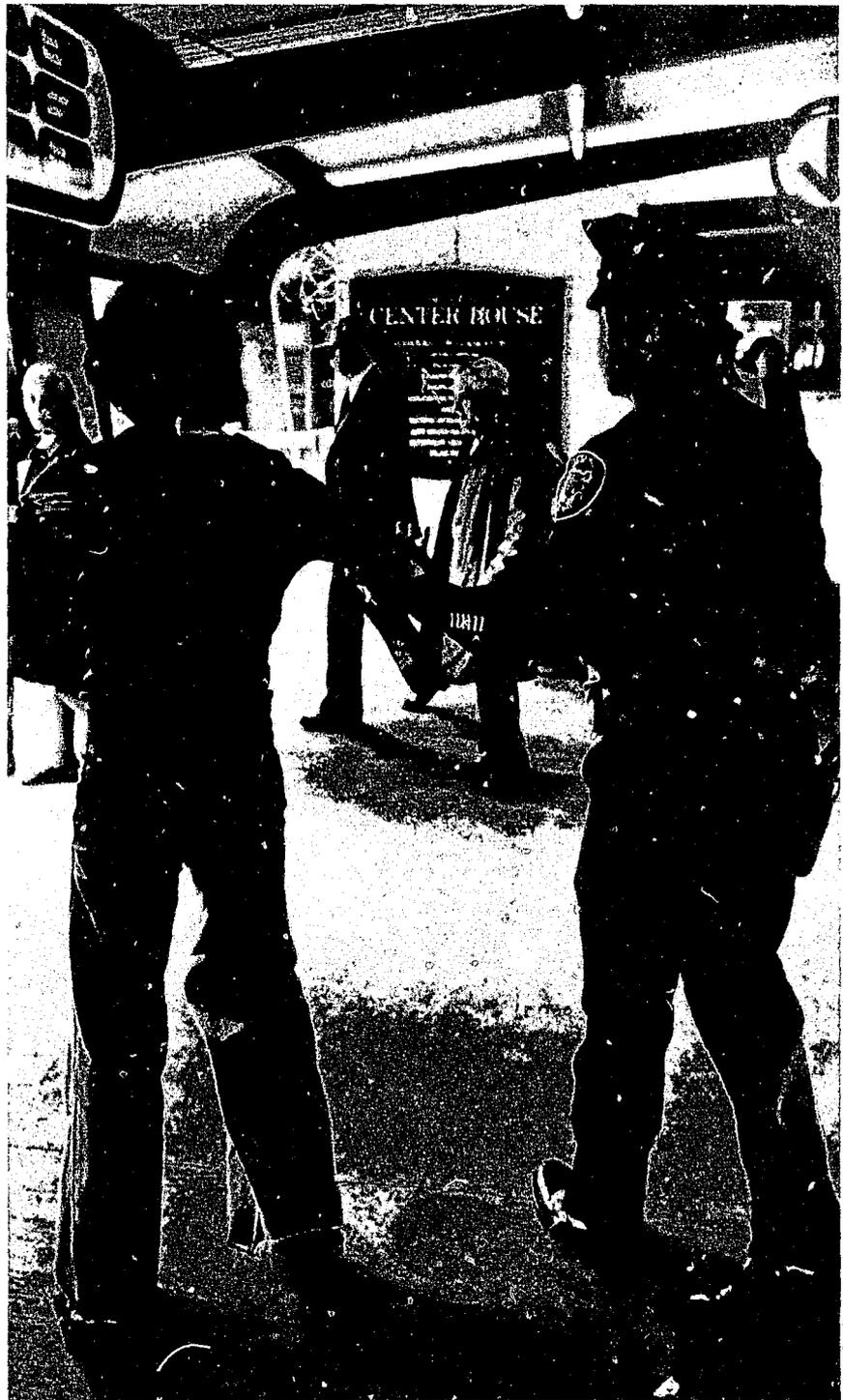
The Explorer Scouts, consisting of young men and women between the ages of 15 and 20, also attend the police academy for 8 hours every Saturday for 13 weeks. They are assigned by SAS to deal with crowd control at various Center events, most parades, and at the annual July Seafair celebration. They also perform these services without pay.

During the school year thousands of students from schools throughout

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the greater Seattle area are brought to the Center to attend such events as the symphony and opera as part of cultural enrichment programs. This often results in the arrival of as many as 60 loaded school buses in as little as an hour. The buses have to be accommodated and directed to parking and the students safely directed across adjacent streets. Daytime activities of this nature occur approximately 400 times a year. In addition, evening events are held, ranging from opera to professional sports, which are attended by thousands. With this impact of pedestrian and vehicular traffic compressed into short time spans, the presence of SAS officers is absolutely necessary to eliminate potential chaos.

The SAS also performs all other regularly accepted police functions in the immediate area of the Center. With large numbers of people so greatly concentrated, it would be foolish to presume that problems at the relatively crime-free Center are non-existent. Recently there was a serious car-prowl problem on the streets and in the parking lots adjacent to the Center grounds. By utilizing additional reserve officers and employing



stake-out tactics, it wasn't long before the problem had been reduced by 50 percent. The unit maintains its own crime analysis function, using pin maps to target potential trouble spots.

Juvenile strong-arm artists are always a matter of concern for SAS officers, who must also contend with counterfeit tickets presented at events, ticket scalpers, panhandlers, liquor violators, marijuana peddlers, lost property, runaways, and lost children. These are problems for which these officers are particularly suited because of their intimate and daily acquaintance with the buildings, the people, and the 74 acres comprising the Seattle Center.

For the past 2 years the Special Activities Section has also been responsible for security at the 65,000-seat Kingdome stadium and this has posed additional staffing problems. The covered, multi-use facility is home to three professional sports franchises and hosts every type of event from recreational vehicle shows to indoor motocross.

The different kinds of events and the size of the crowds at this facility pose problems that SAS does not encounter at the Center grounds, but the unit's experience over the years with the latter has contributed to successful handling of this new challenge.

A baseball game with an attendance nearing 35,000, for example, requires about 20 officers, 3 sergeants, and a lieutenant. A soccer match requires 23 officers and 4 supervisors, while a professional football game with an attendance in excess of 50,000 requires over 50 officers and more than a half-dozen sergeants. An extremely

popular rock group, however, presents problems that require 250 or more officers and a dozen supervisors.

In addition to having to schedule this many men, the SAS lieutenant is faced with another problem. The Kingdome is a county-operated facility located within the city limits of Seattle, and to avoid the potential conflict in this situation and any accusations of favoritism, the lieutenant schedules a force of one-half county police personnel and one-half city police department personnel for all events requiring security. This method has worked out well during the Dome's relatively brief history. The spinoff effect of this use of officers from the city and county has been the fostering of good will between the two departments whose officers seldom had the opportunity before to meet in an official capacity.

In 1977, the Kingdome hosted a nationally known rock group in a sold-out concert. Customers camped out at the facility beginning 2 days in advance. SAS scheduled personnel to provide 48-hour security for the event and utilized over 260 officers and supervisors during that period. Although both sworn and reserved officers are used at the Center, only sworn officers are used at the Kingdome. When it became obvious that sufficient off-duty city and county personnel were not available, other agencies within the county were contacted and officers were successfully recruited to augment available personnel.

This past summer, SAS was confronted with the challenge of providing security for the priceless Treasures of Tutankhamen exhibit currently touring the United States. In order to



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safely house the exhibit, the Flag Plaza Pavilion on the Center grounds underwent extensive renovation. SAS had primary and complete responsibility for security which was provided on a 24-hour basis, primarily through the use of off-duty personnel.

During the 14- to 16-hours a day that the exhibit was open to the public, the treasures were guarded by a crew of 12 officers and a sergeant assigned by SAS. The security measures taken in Chicago and New Orleans to protect the exhibit were examined to assure adequate public exposure to the treasures and to insure protection at the same time. The length of the display, from July 15th through November 15th, made it in effect a small rock concert 7 days a week for 4 months in terms of manpower needs.

The normal budget of the unit, though inflated in 1978 by the addition of the Tutankhamen exhibit, is usually about \$275,000 per year, with about \$265,000 of that in personnel services. After examining what the unit accomplishes in terms of crowd control, traffic control, and security

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at events ranging in size from 3,000 to 60,000 people, with a permanent contingent of only 13 officers, it is obvious that the overall cost to the department budget would be far higher if SAS had to address the problem differently.

Use of on-duty personnel, paid overtime, would be an awesome financial burden on the budget, plus there would be a diversion of manpower and resources. By relying almost exclusively on off-duty personnel whose services are paid for by private firms, these problems are avoided. By using the services of dedicated volunteers to perform routine police functions at the Seattle Center grounds, the same cost factor is overcome in an area of such heavy use that police presence is a necessity. An example, however, might serve to indicate the magnitude of the savings. Assume that a rock concert requires 20 officers, paid at the rate of a first-grade officer's salary at \$9.00 per hour for approximately 3 hours. This situation, magnified by 40 concerts a year, comes to almost \$22,000 alone. Imagine the cost when the event requires more than 250 officers!

One additional factor in the success the SAS enjoys is the close co-

operation of the Crimes Specific Section (See *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, Vol. 47, No. 2, February 1978) and the neighboring patrol units. They provide the backup which is vitally important to the effectiveness of the unit.

The Crimes Specific officers come and go freely at the Center, working the crowds for scalpers, purse snatchers, car prowlers, liquor violators, and drug offenders. They work in plain clothes as opposed to SAS officers who are basically a uniform force unless necessity dictates otherwise. They also augment SAS personnel inside at some of the potential trouble spots, such as rock concerts, hockey games, boxing and wrestling matches, etc.

The neighboring patrol units assist by making frequent transportation runs so that SAS officers need not leave the grounds when making arrests. This is in addition to overlapping patrol of the immediate area.

One measure of the unit's success is the continued use of the Center by local residents, tourists, and promoters. According to the unit's leader, “The Center is a place to which a person can feel comfortable about

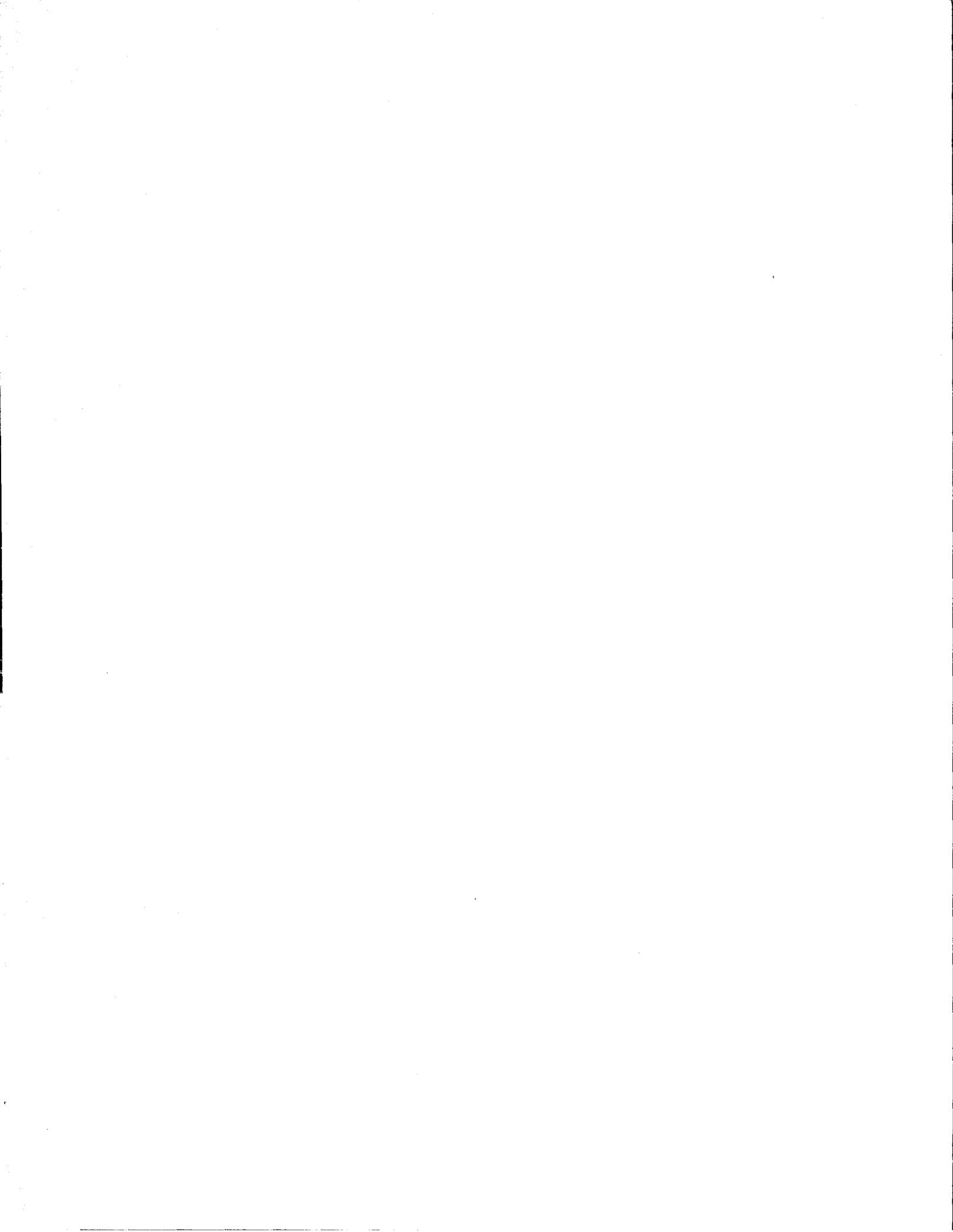
sending his children and their grandmother. That feeling exists because people can take advantage of the wide range of activities in an area of relatively low crime occurrence with the presence of trained police officers always ready to assist.”

The general manager of the Seattle Center has nothing but praise for the Special Activities Section and the service it provides at the Center:

“This detachment of officers, in my opinion, provides the greatest service and assistance to the Center of any department in the city. Their assistance in crowd control for the hundreds of events held at the Center from festivals to rock concerts is second to none in the Nation. Their model has been used by many of my manager counterparts to establish new or revamp existing programs.

“The attitude of the officers is reflected in the public's feeling of safety while enjoying the Center, and this has been translated into part of our ongoing healthy financial picture. The officers have become an integral part of our total community. They have a special appreciation for the Center while never neglecting their primary responsibility—the police department.”

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