

# TechBeat

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by JTIC

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## About TechBeat



TechBeat is the monthly newsmagazine of the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center System. Our goal is to keep you up to date on technologies for the public safety community and research efforts in government and private industry.

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# Badges for Basics Helps KCPD Develop Community Rapport

## Badges for Basics Helps KCPD Develop Community Rapport

After the first 20 minutes, the officers staffing the “pop-up” Badges for Basics table might have begun to wonder if the whole thing was a mistake. Although the event gave community members a chance to obtain much-needed toiletries for free, it appeared that the officers couldn’t give the products away.

Finally, a few skeptical people stopped to find out what the event was all about. They took the products, passed the time of day, and went home and called their friends. In a few minutes, the rush was on.

Badges for Basics, a program of the Kansas City (Mo.) Police Department, stems from a partnership developed with Giving the Basics, a nonprofit organization based in Kansas City with a nationwide outreach. Giving the Basics has 511 distribution sites in the greater Kansas City area, working with schools, food pantries, other charitable organizations and now several police departments, including KCPD, in an effort to provide much-needed and hard-to-afford hygiene items to those in need.

“It’s a grassroots effort to help the police departments make a direct community relations impact,” says Giving the Basics Executive Director Teresa Hamilton. “Interested departments need to register with us, and Kansas City has offered to mentor other departments that want to join the effort.” To that end, the two organizations have teamed up on a videoconference to explain the project.



Officer Vito Mazzara, who leads the Badges for Basics effort, says the partnership started when Hamilton cold-called the agency, and because of his work in community policing, he was soon drawn into the effort.

“A lot of people living in apartment complexes are on state-provided income and also get food stamps. Those programs do not cover the purchase of hygiene products. I realized it would be an amazing thing to provide people with products they normally don’t have because they have no money to buy them,” Mazzara says.

One of the apartment complexes in his area offered to host a chili cook-off to coincide with Badges for Basics first “pop-up” giveaway event, and within 45 minutes, all the items were gone. But rather than become angry that the giveaway had run out, residents still lingered, talking with the officers and building up a rapport. Officers asked them which products they liked, which ones they did not need, and used that information to develop a baseline of what items were needed.

“We found out that the two most demanded products were, and still remain, deodorant and paper towels,” Mazzara says. “I didn’t realize it, but deodorant is a luxury item for many people, and many people go without it.”

Obtaining that baseline helped KCPD create an inventory of items that people both want and use. Giving the Basics provides individual items to KCPD and other partners, not prepackaged hygiene kits that may contain useless items. “People don’t need a new toothbrush every month, but they do need shampoo,” Hamilton says.

All items come directly from manufacturers to maintain consistency of product, and are

funded either by donations from the companies themselves or by monetary donations. Giving the Basics uses this approach rather than holding drives to collect toiletries, which again, often result in items that do not meet community needs, Hamilton says.

“We hold these pop-up events where we just appear at an intersection and set up tables with the products. This gives officers a chance to explain what we have, give them what they need and start building a rapport,” Mazzara says. “We’ve had people who were skeptical at first, and a week later they walk into a station and ask if they can have more. At some point in the future, building that rapport might help de-escalate a situation.”

KCPD doesn’t use Badges for Basics as an end to collecting tips, Mazzara says, although they have received some unsolicited information. Rather, the project’s goal is to promote and encourage community safety and help improve the general well-being of an area. He says he uses the time to talk to them and find out about their families, making sure every family member has his or her own toothbrush, that mothers with large families get plenty of soap and so on.

“We used our heat maps to identify the areas with the highest incidence of violent crime and used that to select the intersections for our pop-up events. We don’t advertise ahead of time, we just show up,” he says. “I also carry a case of water in my car and just hand it out to people on the street. They will start talking to me while they drink it, and as we talk, they come to realize that I’m just there to speak with them, nothing more. It’s a new approach and sometimes the community residents don’t know what to expect either.”

Mazzara also was not sure what to expect from within his own agency either, but when his superiors realized he was using his own personal time to organize and administer the program, they made sure he had plenty of work hours allocated for the tracking tasks. He gets additional support in the form of captains and commanders showing up to do their turn at the pop-up events, which somewhat startles residents and also indicates the agency’s commitment to the effort. It’s just one way that the agency presents itself as caring about the community — by caring about how the community is able to present itself.

“It’s all about how you present yourself. Being clean gives your confidence when you’re trying to get a job or volunteering to answer questions in school. We’re here to help people get stronger and cleaner so they can really soar,” says Hamilton. “It creates an amazing change and we’re hoping we’ll also be watching crime go down in these areas.”

For more information on how an agency can start its own project, contact Giving the Basics at [www.givingthebasics.org](http://www.givingthebasics.org).

*Article photo:* Kansas City (Mo.) Police Department

*Main photo:* Kansas City (Mo.) Police Department



## **Brunch Patrol Seeks to Build Positive Relationships Between Students, Police**

### **Brunch Patrol Seeks to Build Positive Relationships Between Students, Police**

During the kickoff for the Normandy Schools Collaborative’s “Brunch Patrol,” after watching local police officers share a meal and interact with high school students, a local reporter approached Chief of Security Steve Harmon and asked the date of the next time.

Tomorrow, Harmon said. This isn’t a once-a-quarter special event; it’s an everyday thing.

That everyday thing means that officers from the 12 municipal police departments in the Normandy, Mo., school district are welcome in any of the seven schools’ cafeterias, any time, to share a free breakfast or lunch and a visit with students. (Two of the local departments provide two school resource officers each to the district, but student interaction with officers from the other 10 agencies usually happens outside of school.)

Harmon says in an area and an era where distrust of law enforcement trends high, the program’s goal is to help build healthy, positive



relationships between students and local law enforcement, and he hopes the Brunch Patrol can lead to encounters along the lines of “how ya doin’ Officer Mike,” rather than those that are more negative.



Harmon, a retired police officer and attorney who took over the security chief’s position in 2018, says that although the district will have some minimal costs for the additional meals, he thinks the payoff in improved relationships will be well worth it: “I hope this will foster relationships between students, their families, local law enforcement and everyone in the community.”

The need for improved community relationships hits close to home. Teenager Michael Brown, who was fatally shot by a police officer in Ferguson, Mo., in 2014, graduated from Normandy High School. The shooting touched off protests that lasted for weeks. A grand jury decided not to indict the officer.

Harmon hopes the Brunch Patrol program can be a part of an effort to ensure that his suburban St. Louis district does not experience anything like the incidents in neighboring Ferguson in the future. To that end, local law enforcement provided a strong turnout for the mid-September kickoff event, and Harmon hopes the officers continue to come out during the rest of the school year. He believes that a strong show of support from the administrations of the local law enforcement agencies and the school district provide a strong indication that they will.

“We’ve heard nothing but positive feedback from both of them, and I was pleasantly surprised to find out we had strong support from the teachers as well. They told me they thought it was ‘the neatest thing’ and wondered why no one ever thought of it before,” Harmon says. “Local officers have always been encouraged to stop in and visit with students when they had time, but adopting an official program with a name gives them that much more incentive to stop in, share a meal and make some friends.”

Although it is too soon to begin measuring the program’s success, the positive feedback from stakeholders and the fact that officers continued to stop in at the various schools for meals following the kickoff event provide encouraging initial indicators.

“Things are no different here than in many other communities in the United States in that there is a need to improve relations between communities and the police,” Harmon says of the 3,200-student district, which encompasses a high school, an early learning center and five elementary schools.

“I hope that other school districts and departments pick up on it. There are all kinds of Police Athletic Leagues around the country that sponsor baseball, basketball and boxing. This could be another tool in that toolbox,” he says. “The students never get a chance to interact with police officers in a laughing, joking manner. This gives them a chance to see the police in a different light and maybe flip their attitude about officers to a positive one.”

For more information, contact Steve Harmon at [sharmon@normandysc.org](mailto:sharmon@normandysc.org).

*Article photo:* iStock.com/SolStock

*Main photo:* Normandy, Mo. Police Department



# Program Provides a Safe Place to Report Hate Crimes

## Program Provides a Safe Place to Report Hate Crimes

It is not uncommon for businesses to display several decals in their front windows, maybe something from a security company or a local chamber of commerce. In some 130-plus cities in the United States, businesses also display a rainbow decal that includes the words “Safe Place.”

The city of San Jose, Calif., and its police department recently joined that group as a member of the Safe Place program that originated in Seattle in 2015. Seattle’s Safe Place program originally focused on LGBT hate crimes, but later expanded to include all types of hate crimes. With its success, the Seattle Police Department created a program-specific website and began encouraging other departments to join.

The program sounds simple: police departments recruit businesses and train their employees on how to provide a safe place for victims of hate crimes to get help with reporting, then allow



those businesses to display the Safe Place decal. The San Jose Police Department expects the program to pay huge dividends, not only in additional reports of hate crimes but also with an improved perception that San Jose is a community that cares about people's safety.



“When a city has really strong adoption and someone walking along the street sees a lot of these stickers, it lets them know that this a community and a police department that cares and that takes hate crimes seriously,” says Officer James Gonzales, program coordinator. “It creates a sense of security that if something does happen, you will receive help. This tells people that if something terrible does happen to them, we will do something about it.”

San Jose's participation in the program started in August with about 70 Starbucks and Wells Fargo locations as the original partners; those two businesses already participated in the program in other cities. As soon as the word got out, Gonzales says, SJPD began getting applications from credit unions, schools, nail parlors, ice cream shops and many other businesses. Participants must sign an agreement indicating that at least two employees are on duty during all hours the business is open, and that one will contact 911 while the other remains with the victim, making him or her comfortable. All employees must receive training in these procedures before the police department will accept the business as a partner.

“Seattle has worked hard to make sure that participating cities use a consistent method and consistent training,” Gonzales says. “They warned us that there might be a spike in reported hate crimes, not because the actual rate increased but rather because people feel more comfortable reporting when they know the program exists.”

He adds that businesses can perform the training on their own, using materials provided by the police department, or the SJPD will provide onsite training on request.

“We're not expecting a flood of individuals coming into businesses and reporting crimes, but it's important that employees receive the proper training on how to react if someone does come in. It's more likely the police department will receive an increased volume of reports through traditional channels because residents know that this is a city that will respond,” Gonzales says.

Because San Jose wanted to be perceived as a city that will respond, its community advisory

board had looked at a number of existing initiatives before deciding to deploy Safe Place. Although it's too soon to statistically measure results, Gonzales says the department believes it is already improving community relations.

The Safe Place concept is specifically intended to be managed by local law enforcement, not the participating businesses or community organizations. It also includes an optional anti-bullying initiative. To learn more, visit [here](#).

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# Forensic Technology Center of Excellence Introduces Workforce Calculator

## *Forensic Technology Center of Excellence*

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Forensic Technology Center of Excellence (FTCoE) recently released a workforce calculator, housed on the FTCoE website.

This beta version of the calculator helps laboratories identify the personnel required to support a given level of casework within each area of identification and the associated investment in capital equipment to support that level of activity. As a proof of concept, the calculator was developed from a selection of laboratories that met a standard of 90-percent laboratory-wide efficiency using the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors Maximus award criteria.

An econometric analysis examined laboratory performance in light of the type of jurisdiction (state, metro or regional), size population served and state crime rates (violent and property).

Resulting econometric models estimate the relationship between the full-time equivalent (FTE) workforce and achievement of the 90-percent efficiency standard for laboratory analysis.

Laboratories are encouraged to test the calculator and report findings to principal investigator Paul Speaker ([paul.speaker@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:paul.speaker@mail.wvu.edu)). Their insights will be incorporated into a more detailed econometric analysis used in the final version. For more information and to download the beta tool, visit [here](#).

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## **Police Executive Research Forum Releases Report on Police Recruitment and Retention**

### *Police Executive Research Forum*

Visit [here](#) to download *The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It*, a new publication from the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF).

Produced using information from an extensive survey on recruit and retention and a task force meeting, the publication discusses the current nationwide crisis in recruiting and retaining law enforcement officers. Agencies nationwide are experiencing decreased applications, early exits and higher retirement rates, resulting in a significant shortage of officers.

The report looks at issues such as identifying and attracting nontraditional candidates and concerns about finding young officers with the right skill sets. It includes key takeaways, trends and statistics, and provides examples of successful recruitment and retention polices.

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