Department receives international Leadership in Victim Services Award

In the aftermath of a traumatic, troubling and often unexpected crime, victims and witnesses are commonly at a loss as to what to do next — or what help they can receive.

Since 2010, the Virginia Commonwealth University Police Department has been working purposely to improve its response to people who come forward after a crime has been committed.

After expanding training for officers, dedicating an officer to coordinate victim-witness services and collaborating extensively with partners at VCU and in Richmond, VCU Police has been recognized for its victim-centered practices by an international policing agency.

On Oct. 24, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) awarded VCU Police with the IACP Leadership in Victim Services Award. VCUPD was one of two award winners, taking the top award in the small agency category. The award honors agencies that use innovation, problem-solving, best practices, partnerships, training and monitoring tools to better their responses to crime victims. VCUPD was a runner-up for the same award in 2015.

“Being compassionate and empathetic to victims, and witnesses, is something that has been at the forefront of how we respond to all criminal incidents,” said VCUPD Chief John Venuti. “Working with each person who comes forward helps us build trust and allows us to help them navigate what services they may need.”

When a crime victim or witness comes forward, a specially trained officer, known as a victim-witness specialist, meets with the person to gauge their needs. Victims may need immediate medical attention or a health assessment, counseling, financial assistance, or may want to speak with a confidential victim advocate; VCU Police officers make sure the person gets whatever support they need.

In 2007, the agency had six officers trained to respond to victims of violent crime. In 2013, Venuti designated Ofc. Tricia Mozingo as the full-time victim-witness coordinator. Today, VCUPD has 16 victim-witness specialists in the patrol division.

All VCUPD personnel have been trained to work with victims in a trauma-informed manner — a practice that is especially important when sexual assault survivors come forward to police. In 2016, the department implemented the You Have Options Program for sexual assault survivors, which provides options for reporting to police, and the university, and makes sure each person knows how reporting processes work.

Mozingo believes word has spread in the community that VCUPD provides solid support to victims.

“Students and staff have come to realize that VCUPD will go above and beyond to help them claim a sense of normalcy after an incident,” Mozingo said. “Because of this, the community members trust that any report they file with the department will be taken seriously, regardless of the nature of the offense.”

As VCUPD transitioned from its old headquarters on West Grace Street to a new headquarters between VCU’s two campuses, Venuti opted to plan the new space in accordance with YHOP’s best practices.

He designated two soft interview rooms that officers and detectives use to speak with crime victims and sexual assault survivors. The rooms are similar to rooms at a

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VCUPD also utilizes the following methods to meet survivors, victims and witnesses needs:

- Arranging court transportation and assistance with extending protection orders
- Updating a victim when an offender is served with a protection order, or arrested
- If an offender is taken into custody, an officer will register the victim in the Virginia V.I.N.E. Network to receive notifications by email, phone or text when the offender is released from jail
- If a person suffers injuries as a result of a crime, specialists can assist in filing a claim on behalf of the victim with the Virginia Victims Fund
- VCUPD assists with accommodations to limit or eliminate contact between the perpetrator and victim
- To avoid re-victimization, officers make every effort to limit the number of times a victim must tell their story

VCUPD works routinely with internal partners, including VCU’s Wellness Resource Center, Student Affairs, Student Counseling/Health, Residential Life, Title IX and VCU Health’s Forensic Nurse Examiners. External partners include the Virginia Attorney General’s Office, Richmond Police Department, the Richmond Commonwealth Attorney’s Office and the Richmond YWCA.

VCUPD conducts an annual perception of safety survey. Using data from this survey, police adjust services and responses to better serve the VCU community. Based on meetings with subgroups in the community, such as the LGBTQIA+ community and the Muslim Student Association, officers have assessed the challenges and cultural differences experienced within these groups to serve them better — and to encourage crime victims to feel more confident in working with police.

Even if a VCU student or staff member has experienced violence off-campus, or in another city or state, an officer will still help that person get help.

Since 2014, VCUPD’s victim-witness officers have had 3,874 contacts with victims; this includes people who are VCU-affiliated, but experienced a crime out of VCUPD jurisdiction. Officers contacted each person and provided information on resources, crime prevention and accommodations.

The number of contacts include those involved in incidents including (but not limited to) robberies, sexual assaults, assaults, stalking, dating violence, theft, identity theft, and mental health crises.

“Our goal is for every person who comes forward to be treated with respect and to receive appropriate support,” Venuti said. “At this university, we want each person to succeed. The last thing we want is anyone who may already be experiencing trauma to be overwhelmed by the criminal justice process.”

— Corey Byers, Public Information Officer

**New officers begin field training**

The VCU Police 42nd Basic Academy Class graduated on Nov. 16. New officers received the following awards of excellence:

- Top score (academics): Lisa Berube and Gayla Clarke
- Top score (driving): Anthony Nagy
- Top score (shooting): Christopher Roberts
- Most Improved PT: Jasmine Noland
- Best all-around: Christi Nassauer

New officers have completed bike school and are currently in field training. They are expected to complete this training in February.

Please join us in welcoming the newest members of the department as they start their careers at VCU.
Election Day in Virginia may have been Nov. 7, but the real election was on Nov. 8, when judges and guests at the VCU Police 8th annual chili cook-off picked their favorite chili recipes. The event raised $346 for FRIENDS Association for Children in Richmond. The following judges selected our winners:

- Brian Moran, Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security
- VCU Men’s Basketball Coach Mike Rhoades
- Larry Little, Vice President of Support Services at VCU Health
- David Young, Executive Director of FRIENDS Association for Children

We thank each of the 15 chefs for their entries and ALL of our guests, who voted on their favorite. The 2018 winners are as follows:

**First Place:** VCUPD Assistant Chief Chris Preuss
**Second Place:** VCUPD Recruiter Conrad Simms
**Third Place:** University of Richmond Police Ofc. Ralph Perez
**Taster’s Choice Award:** VCUPD Sgt. Patience Butters


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I would like to say thank you to everyone who supported the annual Thanksgiving basket drive by the Patrol Division this year. Officers and staff donated a total of $170. We were able to purchase four baskets and desserts for needy families. Full meals were delivered to families in Carver, Oregon Hill, and Randolph. I personally delivered these meals to each family on Nov. 20 and the gratitude that each family had was amazing. Once again, thank you so much for your support! Every basket contributed to providing a family in need with a full Thanksgiving meal —making their holiday a happy holiday.

— Lt. Leonard Dilligard, Patrol Commander
The Well appreciates survivor-centered response

Hi Chief,

I worked with Sgt. Jennifer Riemann and Ofc. Yasmine Espree and I just wanted to say they were both great. I particularly appreciated that as a sergeant, she modeled being survivor-centered AND not jumping to conclusions on a case that was quite difficult and complex. Both Sgt. Riemann and Ofc. Espree were patient and personable. They really were open to all options and I appreciated being able to work with these women to support this student.

Best,

— Fatima M. Smith, MSW, Assistant Director of Sexual & Intimate Partner Violence, Stalking, Advocacy Services, The Wellness Resource Center

Brandcenter thanks sergeant

Chief Venuti,

Just a quick note to tell you how much I appreciate the help of Sgt. Patience Butters. I met her during the Run, Hide, Fight training. The training was very informative and she was helpful when I asked about our specific building.

I normally am the first one in our building and usually in the winter, it’s dark. She came to our location last week. Sgt. Butters sat with me and showed me how to use pepper spray and how to have it accessible in my purse.

Thanks again for having great employees that go out of their way to keep us safe.

— Andrea Groat, Associate Director, VCU Brandcenter

Detective recruiting runners for 2018 marathon and 10k in the spring

Det. Morgan Abbate completed her first half marathon in Richmond on Nov 11. She trained for 14 weeks and her hard work paid off as she crossed the finish line at Browns Island, despite the chilly 28-degree weather. She has hopes of getting a VCUPD team together to complete the full and/or half marathon in 2018. Det. Abbate will be organizing VCUPD’s 2018 Monument 10k team in the coming weeks as well. If you are interested in joining her in either event please contact her at MLAbbate@vcu.edu.
Corrie Miller-Hobbs, program coordinator of Safe Kids Virginia, Ofc. Jonathan Wade and Ofc. Jose Vargas teamed up on Nov. 27 to speak with parents at the Children’s Hospital of Richmond about gun safety and how to lock firearms properly.

Sgt. Patience Butters handed out fliers with other officers on both campuses during a pedestrian safety awareness campaign from Nov. 6 to 17. Between outreach, social media, LiveSafe, list serv emails and other messaging, VCUPD reached 68,600 people.

Before graduating in November, the VCUPD’s 42nd Basic Academy Class collected food throughout October for VCU’s Ram Pantry and the Central Virginia Food Bank.
TOY DRIVE
NOVEMBER 27- DECEMBER 22, 2017
GIVE A CHILD A SMILE AND HOPE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON
DONATE NEW UNWRAPPED GIFTS TO PLACE UNDER THE CHRISTMAS TREE AT CHILDRENS HOSPITAL
DONATION BOXES WILL BE PLACED IN THE LOBBY ON THE 1ST & 3RD FLOORS OF POLICE HEADQUARTERS AND THE HOSPITAL SECURITY OFFICE.
HELP MAKE A CHILD'S WISH COME TRUE

Questions? Contact VCU Police Dispatcher Kiosha Pollard by email: kspollard@vcu.edu.
Chief Venuti,

My name is Lance Tiner and I am a lieutenant with the Beaumont Police Department, in Beaumont, Texas. I apologize for not reaching out to you sooner, but we have been swamped, trying to get this section of Texas back to normal. As you know, this whole region was devastated by Hurricane Harvey, during the summer. It was during this time, and historically, during trying times, that you see the good in people. We saw a lot here, from our officers and we saw a lot of good, from officers from around the country.

While we were trying to get our city and many officers' personal homes in order, my unit was tasked with pulling security for a logistics site that furnished water to our citizens. On one of those early days, I drove to our station and was taking care of some admin stuff. While there, I noticed a big white van in our Sally port. I just assumed it was one of many deliveries and walked out to assist in the unloading of the van. It was then that I had the privilege of meeting 3 of your officers, Nick Finch, Andrew Riggott, and Chris Kesler. I asked them what they were delivering and they had all sorts of supplies, food items, clothing items, and toiletries. I asked them who they were for and they specifically said that the items were for the officers. I was then advised that they were from the great state of Virginia, and that they had rented the van and driven here to assist police officers that were impacted by the storm.

I was taken aback by the generosity and the sense of duty that these young officers displayed. I even told them that I would be glad to have them working for us, but not to take them away from you. They were here for several days and they not only assisted Beaumont PD, but I had them go to a neighboring agency, where they assisted individual officers with supplies and also assisted the officers in the actual tear down of their flood ravaged homes. Your officers went well beyond the call of duty, during their time in Texas. Their work and their desire to assist their brothers, in blue, is a testament to what kind of officers that you have working for you. I commend you, chief, for having officers of this caliber, on your staff.

Their work and their desire to assist their brothers, in blue, is a testament to what kind of officers that you have working for you. I commend you, chief, for having officers of this caliber, on your staff.

Thank you for allowing them to make the trip.

In meeting them, it made some of us older officers remember what it was like to be an officer in the first few years of a phenomenal career and profession. Again, I apologize for taking this long to reach you. I will have my chief send you commendation letters for their actions, while they were here.

Fraternally,

— Lt. Lance Tiner, Beaumont Police Department, in Beaumont, Texas, BPD Swat/ BPD SAU

VCUPD's magic number in Coats For Kids drive: 125

Capt. Ervin “EJ” Taylor rounded up 125 coat donations for this year's Coats for Kids drive by Puritan Cleaners (which doubled last year's count). Puritan & Ch. 8 picked up the coats on Nov. 20 and will clean them before distributing them to families in need throughout Richmond. Thanks to everyone who donated!

(Photo from left: WRIC 8 News meteorologist Matt DiNardo, VCU Police Capt. Taylor, Bob Weirup of Weirup Marketing and VCU Police Public Information Officer Corey Byers.)
Ofc. Longnecker coordinates stocking stuffer collection for Carver Elementary School

In the past, VCUPD personnel set up and decorated the Giving Tree, a holiday tree inside Carver Elementary, during the first week of December. On the last week of school prior to winter break, police placed presents under the tree for students in need.

This year, the Communities in Schools of Richmond Site Coordinator for Carver Elementary has asked that instead of donating wrapped gifts, that VCUPD staff purchase **stocking stuffers**. Students need items such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, floss and deodorant. However, fun items are also welcome, such as fingernail polish, fun pencils, matchbox cars, lip gloss, stickers, card games, jewelry making supplies, Play-Doh, etc.

We are asking staff to support this VCUPD community service project, The Giving Tree, by purchasing the above items, or by making a monetary donation, which will be used to purchase these items. **All donations are due by Dec. 15.** A collection box will be placed on the first floor read-off room of VCU Police headquarters (224 East Broad St.).

Last year the department donated 88 gifts to the students at Carver Elementary. Please consider contributing in some way to this worthy cause. If you have any questions or concerns, contact me by email: longneckerss@vcu.edu.

- Police staffers will stuff stockings and deliver them to the school.
- George Washington Carver Elementary School serves approximately 500 students in grades Kindergarten through 5th grade. Carver Elementary is a designated Title I school; this is based on the percentage of free and reduced meals received by the majority of students. A majority of the students reside in Gilpin Court, one of largest public housing communities in Richmond.

This is the 4th year we’ve collected gifts for students in Carver and we thank you for your continued support of all we do here at VCU Police. Happy Holidays to you and your family!

— Ofc. Sean Longnecker, Patrol Division

Pedestrian outreach draws thanks

Hi [Chief Venuti],

[I] had a very nice conversation with one of your officers yesterday after he handed me a safety flyer at 11th and Leigh. Ofc. Frederic Wiggins… I very much appreciated his listening to me describe my near misses as a pedestrian (an attentive one!) in crosswalks. My walk between the Coliseum Deck and West Hospital is always an adventure, especially at 11th and Marshall. He assured me that the initiative targets drivers, too.

Just wanted to acknowledge him and thank you for this much-needed effort.

Best wishes,

— Paula K. Kupstas, PhD, Director, Doctoral Program in Health Related Sciences, School of Allied Health Professions
Blood Drive
VCU Police Department
Academy Classroom
224 E Broad St
Richmond, VA 23219

Thursday, December 14, 2017
12:00 PM to 6:00 PM

Please call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or visit redcrossblood.org and enter "VCUPD" to schedule an appointment.

Questions? Contact VCU Police Sgt. Patience Butters by email: crimeprevreq@vcu.edu.