

Police Forum - 12/11/96

Successful police/community relations forum to be repeated

Understanding the police

■ **MANALAPAN TOWNSHIP:** To foster a better understanding of police procedures by the public, a seminar is planned from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Dec. 11 at the headquarters of the Monmouth County Library System, 125 Symmes Drive.

Participants can share concerns and perceptions with police officers about bias, police conduct and guidelines that govern police behavior when dealing with the public. Officers will explain what happens during a motor vehicle stop and how they investigate bias crimes and domestic violence.

The sponsors are the Monmouth County Human Relations Commission, the county's Police Chiefs Association and New Jersey Region Chapter of the National Conference.

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The Courier Nov-14, 1996

MIDDLETOWN — Due to the success of its first police/community relations information seminar and discussion forum held in June, the Monmouth County Human Relations Commission has been asked to repeat the program in western Monmouth County.

The first forum allowed clarification and information-sharing between law enforcement personnel and community-based groups. There was an opportunity to express concerns and to address misperceptions and misunderstanding.

The second police/community relations information seminar and discussion forum will be held on Wednesday, Dec. 11, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the Western Monmouth County Library, 125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan. There will be no charge and light refreshments will be provided.

The sessions will promote com-

munication between police officers and the communities that they serve. Participants will share concerns and perceptions with police officers about police bias, police conduct and the existing guidelines that govern police behavior when interacting with the public.

Law enforcement personnel will also provide information about their protocols, policies and practices that affect the daily lives of Monmouth County residents. Topics will include motor vehicle stops, bias crimes, and domestic violence.

The event is co-sponsored by the Monmouth County Human Relations Commission, New Jersey Region Chapter of the National Conference, and the Monmouth County Police Chiefs' Association. The public is strongly encouraged to take advantage of this unique chance to be heard. For more information call: 291-4257.

Bridge to understanding

Forum will allow residents, police to share views

During the presidential campaign, President Clinton talked about building a bridge to a better future. That cannot happen, however, until bridges are built across cultural, racial, ethnic and religious chasms that divide people.

That's what the Monmouth County Human Relations Commission will attempt to do next month for residents and police in the western part of the county.

The commission is co-sponsoring its second forum this year — the first was held in Middletown Township for eastern Monmouth County — to allow police and residents to share concerns and perceptions. The forum sponsors, which include the New Jersey Chapter of the National Conference and the Monmouth County Police Chiefs Association, plan to encourage discussion of difficult issues that can hinder effective policing.

Police conduct, motor vehicle stops and guidelines for police behavior when interacting with the public will be among the issues discussed.

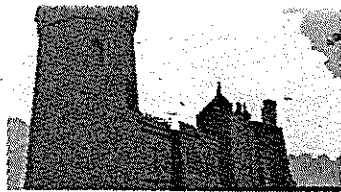
Law enforcement officials will air their concerns as well and will try to shed light on police policies and practices that affect the lives of county residents.

The forum will be held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Dec. 11 at the Monmouth County Library headquarters, 125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan Township. The day — a Wednesday — and hour of the forum could keep some working people from attending. At the meeting in June, police outnumbered residents about 3 to 1.

This time around, however, people who can't attend may get a chance to hear the discussion. Brookdale Community College, site of the first police-community forum in June, will videotape the meeting. The Human Relations Commission plans to make the videotape available to community groups and at public gathering places, such as county libraries. It is a needed extension of the forum, which is held during the week to minimize the cost of police participation to municipalities.

Anyone with questions about the forum may call the Monmouth County Human Relations Commission at (908) 291-4257.

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TWIN LIGHTS

COMMUNITY

Your weekly hometown news section

SECTION G

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WEDNESDAY, JAN. 8, 1997

INSIDE

'Abuse' personfied

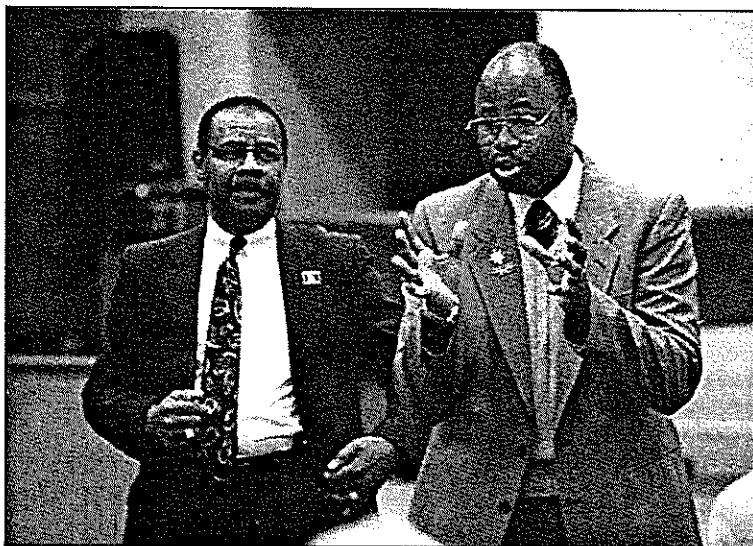
A Jewelbox Theatre production tackles the subject of substance abuse, depicting it as a seductive temptress who grabs hold and won't let go. **PAGE 3**

Stage craft

A Long Branch playwright recently had two of his plays open off-Broadway. **PAGE 3**

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IN SPORTS



STEVE SCHOLFIELD/Staff Photographer

● Jerry Hamlin (left) and Louis Jordan of the Monmouth County Prosecutor's office portray policeman and John Q. Public in a role play exercise at a Police Community Relations Information Seminar and Discussion Forum. At right, Judith Kabus of the Women's Center of Monmouth County speaks during a session.

Police work to improve image

By ERIC GONZALEZ
STAFF WRITER

Local police are aware some people see them as above the law and inaccessible to the everyday citizen. But they're working to change that.

On Dec. 11 the second Police Community Relations Information Seminar and Discussion Forum was held at Monmouth County Library Headquarters in Manalapan Township. Among topics of discussion were domestic violence procedures, bias crimes, police policy and internal affairs issues.

Uma Ramakrishna of the Monmouth County Human Relations Committee, one of the forum's sponsors, said there is a perception of injustice.

COUNTY LAW OFFICERS MET WITH THE PUBLIC IN A FORUM DESIGNED TO CHANGE SOME PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE WAY THEY DO THEIR JOBS

"In this highly complex and diverse society, many feel victims of stereotypes, bias crimes and discrimination," she said.

Robert Honecker, assistant county prosecutor, said the system is good, but there's always room for improvement.

"I've always believed the Monmouth County law enforcement is the best in New Jersey," he said. "But we also accept criticism and build to be what I think we already are: the best."

Law enforcement officials have improved their treatment of domestic violence cases, said Judith Kabus of the Women's Center of Monmouth County. A catalyst toward this improvement was the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act of 1982, which Kabus called "one of the country's best"

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Forum

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pieces of domestic violence legislation.

Kabus said at first police didn't know how to implement the law, since keeping family matters in the home had been the cultural norm. But through time and with assistance from the Women's Center, violence against women has decreased.

"It used to be cops would take the man for a walk around the block to sober him up or tell him to take a cold shower," Kabus said. "Only women knew how much danger they were in, but gradually this dynamic circle of violence has improved."

A sexual assault exam program started Jan. 1 in police stations throughout the county, said Honecker. This program will train officers and nurses on how to conduct physical examinations after a woman has been assaulted.

In the past, officers have stayed in the examination room with nurses and victims to ensure proper handling of evidence, often alienating the emotionally fragile victims, Kabus said.

The new exam program trains nurses to examine patients without police present.

While citizens might not like how police handle situations, the job is most often being done correctly, organizers said. That point was illustrated when Jerry Hamlin and Louis Jordan of the county prosecutor's office portrayed policeman and John Q. Public in a role play exercise.

Sometimes an officer may be inclined to explain his or her actions in a given situation, to avoid a confrontation, Hamlin said. "But this can easily turn into nothing but verbal judo between the officer and citizen."

Jordan, as Mr. Public, complained how he'd received ticket after traffic ticket without explanation. But Lt. Mike DiAiso of the Freehold Police Department said proper procedure is to not answer questions.

"If I start explaining to a driver what he did wrong, his first reaction will be to deny it, and a useless argument can begin," he said.

"He can explain his actions to the judge but that's not my job. In fact, if he's polite and mature, and he checks out with no points, he'll probably get away with just a warning."

This balance of maintaining proce-

dure and applying discretion is a fine line, said Kathy West of the prosecutor's office. Citizens must remember that police officers are normal human beings, "just with different training."

Part of proper law enforcement is being human and knowing when to enforce which laws, West added.

"If every law was enforced all the time, courts would be clogged and people would be incensed," she said.

Prioritizing crimes and criminals is part of the job, she said. She also used the example of driving violations.

"If there's a man speeding with two young kids in the back seat, you don't want the child's first exposure to police to be negative, so you might be a little lenient," she said.

"But if the speeder is dumb enough to give attitude to the officer, he'll probably get a ticket."

West said when citizens understand why police officers do what they do, they'll realize police generally do a good job.

"Police can't make me love them, any more than I can make them love me," said Art Weimer, 70, of the Leonardo section of Middletown Township. "But if we work together, we can pass the laws that make them better."