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# UM's community approach to policing

**Vanessa Cutter**

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On any given day, the University of Maine could have upward of 20,000 people on campus - students, employees, alumni and visitors-making it more like the "city of UMaine," according to Chief Noel March, director of UMaine Public Safety. With such high volume, one might expect chaos and crime.

Or, one could expect a composed, smoothly operating system, according to March, who came to campus in early 2002 with many credentials and one objective: to strengthen the public safety department by incorporating a community policing philosophy. He has utilized his expertise and made an impact on Public Safety outreach and involvement with community members.

Community policing stresses that officers are educators first and law enforcers second. Crime prevention and local problem-solving are the foundation of this method.

The community policing model encourages students and officials to become familiar with one another on a more approachable, personal basis, said March. The idea promotes everyone working together to address and reduce problems.

With increased trust between students and officers, a comfort zone is created, reducing the common barrier between law enforcement and citizens.

March challenges his law enforcement team to guide students in becoming an active part of their community. The university is a perfect setting for these strategies to be put into place, March said. Officers teach public safety knowledge and students are urged to put these aspects into practice, improving the campus one step at a time.

"Community-oriented policing helps in humanizing the officers through working in partnership with students," said Public Safety Sgt. Deborah Mitchell, who has been with the unit for 22 years.

The main issues Public Safety deals with are alcohol abuse, underage drinking, dorm damage and theft by students and visitors. March says that many problems such as assault, vandalism and traffic accidents stem from the "irresponsible use of alcohol."

According to the UMaine Public Safety Law Incident Comparison, alcohol offenses are up drastically from last year. In 2005, 75 people were arrested and charged with drunk driving on campus. March plans to decrease this number by implementing more frequent roadblocks at campus entrances. This

year, the checkpoints have been enforced every weekend.

"This campus is too dark. There are too many pedestrians and too many cars. Get a [designated driver], take the late night local, call a taxi," March said. "There are more taxis between Orono and Old Town than there are police cars."

This year, Public Safety has decided to take community policing to the next level by teaming officers with resident directors, resident assistants and area coordinators. On campus, there are four geographical areas in which March assigns officers. He calls it "giving deeds," with officers designated to protect certain buildings and residence halls. The project is another way for students to bond with the officers who, in turn, get to know "the neighborhood," as March calls it.

The 660-acre university is so densely populated, it even has its own zip code. With students representing 48 states and 76 countries, Public Safety feels there needs to be a united effort in controlling the flow of crime through one mindset.

However, the department can't be the only component contributing to crime prevention. Students are a vital factor in community policing. They have the ability to make campus life better by remembering simple safety tips.

Public Safety encourages students to be aware of their surroundings and be cautious of strangers. Lock doors. Travel in groups and watch out for each other. Most importantly, be responsible when consuming alcohol.

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