

Thanking Your Agency Volunteers

The Best Recognition Is From The Heart



■ **Gifts from the heart are the most memorable.** One of the best examples I've seen to provide true heartfelt recognition and thanks to an agency's volunteer force came from Ms. Chris Wolf, then volunteer coordinator at the Chino, California, Police Department. It is simple, no cost, and to the point. Ms. Wolf sent an e-mail prior to the holiday season to all the command staff, officers, and civilian employees of the agency soliciting their thoughts regarding the agency's Community Support Team volunteer members. With many thoughtful responses in hand, she developed a neat and simple 6 x 5 inch spiral bound book, each page containing one of the many quotes she received from the employees, while adding some nice holiday icons to each page. One example of a quote included from a patrol officer said, "Thank you for your dedication and positive attitudes. Your smiles, at times, can be just what a police officer needs at the end of a long shift. Merry Christmas, and may God bless you and yours!" A copy of the "Book of Thoughts" was handed out to each volunteer member of the Community Support Team during their end of the year holiday party. According to Ms. Wolf, "you could hear tears hit the floor as they fell off the faces of some CST members, reading page after page of heartfelt thoughts shared by the officers, command staff, and civilian employees of the Chino Police Department."

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With the holiday season and end of year rapidly approaching, some chiefs, sheriffs, and other command staff who are responsible for managing their agency's volunteers may still be thinking, "How can we best thank our volunteers for their efforts this past year?" And, in these tough economic times, the next question that is certain to follow is, "How can we do it with little or no funds?" The truth is, many agency volunteer programs have very limited budgets. If you find yourself in that category, here are a few simple and no-to-low cost solutions that are sure to warm the hearts of your volunteers.

■ **Let the stars shine.** Another simple, no cost, and effective method of showing your agency's expression of appreciation for its volunteers during the holidays comes from the Orange County, Florida, Sheriff's Office. During the holiday season, a large Christmas tree adorns the lobby of the Sheriff's headquarters. Hanging on the tree are stars cut out from green poster board, each one with a different picture of the agency's volunteers glued to them for all to see. In addition to being a wonderful way to thank the volunteers, it also acts as a recruiting tool. As members of the community entering the lobby ask who the people are on the stars, the agency members are provided an opportunity to explain that they are volunteers, and get to discuss their



volunteer program. Many members of the community may not be aware of this program, and it is a chance to potentially gain their interest and participation.

■ **Big bang for a few bucks.** Enter the home of any one of the hundreds of Virginia Beach, Virginia, Police Department volunteers during the holiday season, and you're likely to see Christmas tree decoration ornaments with

the agency's logo and current year printed on them. The idea came from the agency's long time volunteer coordinator, Ms. Sherry Kingsbury. Each year, the agency's volunteers now look forward to receiving a new ornament for that year to hang on their tree and add to their growing collection from past years. While not free to produce, as are the above two examples, the cost is under \$10.00 each, and can last for a lifetime as each ornament is brought out year after year to help decorate the volunteers' own Christmas trees. To help offset the cost, the Christmas tree ornaments can be purchased by others within the police department at the agency's "Cop Shop," where other agency logo items are sold. Smart thinking on the part of Ms.

Kingsbury to help provide a truly memorable way to recognize her volunteers while offsetting the cost of the item by allowing paid staff to purchase them.

■ **Any effort is worthy effort.**

In a perfect world, law enforcement agencies who use volunteers of any form, civilian, auxiliary, and/or sworn reserve officers, would have a dedicated full time coordinator assigned to this task who, in turn, would have all year to plan effective ways to recognize and reward their volunteers. The truth of the matter is that less than 20% of law enforcement agencies who utilize volunteers have a person dedicated to this position. In most cases, the position is an additional function

assigned to a patrol officer or sergeant, often finding themselves multitasking with limited resources and budgets for their volunteers. For the majority of you who are in this position, I'd like to offer the following: anything you can do to express the appreciation of your agency towards your volunteers will be appreciated. While the above three examples I've shared with you are unique, well received, and memorable, in the end, doing nothing at all may stand out equally, but on the negative side. If all you can do this holiday season is send an e-mail or simple Christmas card to your volunteers expressing the heartfelt thanks of your agency for all their efforts throughout the year, then you've done the best you can. In most cases,

your dedicated volunteers will appreciate the effort, as they know your time and resources are limited. For those of you with access to your chief or sheriff, adding a quote from them to a group e-mail or their signature to a Christmas card along with yours is all the better. Remember the old saying, "it's the thought that counts." ♦

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Reprinted with permission from the author: Art Femister is the president and founder of the National Association Citizens On Patrol dedicated to supporting law enforcement volunteers and coordinators with emphasis on citizen patrol organizations. He may be reached at www.nacop.org.

Holiday Gifts that Give Back



This holiday season, send a gift that means an automatic donation to the Illinois Citizens Police Academy Association! When you shop at any of over 700 participating online stores through iGive.com, a portion of each purchase comes back to Illinois CPAA in the form of a donation check.

It's free for you, free for Illinois CPAA, and you pay the same (or less!) than you would be going directly to the store. Shopping online means no wasted gas and no more standing in long lines at the mall.

Save money, save time, and send gifts that give twice.
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