

2005 Amherst Police Report

The 2005 calendar year marked the beginning of a new era for the Amherst Police Department, as well as the other public safety services in Town. For the first time, our communications needs were addressed in town with the opening of the *Amherst Public Safety Communications Center* located within the police station. In addition, the Department transitioned to a new state of the art records management system, including laptops in the cruisers capable of communicating with the dispatch center via cellular technology. These two changes have increased the efficiency of the Department tremendously, as well as improved safety for the police officers. Though change of this magnitude is not without its challenges, our personnel have worked as a team to implement these changes without any major difficulty. The addition of the communication center, with the related upgrade in technology, has put the Department in an excellent position to be able to respond to the residential and commercial growth the Town continues to experience.

As this is our first year utilizing our new software to produce department statistics, some methods of record keeping have changed, and some categories will be difficult to compare to past years. Obviously, the major categories of crimes, arrests, and motor vehicle crashes remain the same, and can be utilized to determine overall trends. The numbers of crashes in Town increased by 21% over last year to a record high, as our roads continue to see a substantial growth in traffic. The ability to reduce the number of crashes in Town requires adequate traffic enforcement action; however it also entails additional planning and study to identify problem areas and recommend potential improvements.

The number of arrests also reached an all time high, rising 6.5% over last year. Many of these arrests are initiated by our patrol officers as they work diligently to enforce the law. A large number of our arrests are motor vehicle related, and are indicative of our commitment to remove unlawful and dangerous drivers from the road. As our commercial areas have developed, an increasing number of arrests have occurred in these areas. This trend is likely to persist as commercial development continues to proceed in our Town.

The total number of crimes reported increased by 3.2% in 2005. Though the overall numbers were up, many key areas that the Department focuses on remained static. Our patrol function has typically targeted burglary as a crime that we can deter with a highly visible police department. This includes neighborhood patrols during the day and more commercial/industrial patrols at night. This has been instrumental in maintaining our low burglary rate. As our area has changed, the crime of robbery has increased dramatically around us. Though our Department did investigate three commercial robberies in 2005, they were not typical of the robberies seen in our surrounding communities. The overall increase in our region has led to a greater patrol commitment in an effort to prevent this from becoming a prevalent crime in our community.

The growth in Amherst, as well as the growth throughout Hillsborough County, has led to increasing demands on the Department as mentioned above. The men and women of the Amherst Police Department continue to perform at a high level, and the result was a positive year in maintaining Amherst as a safe community. The Department has been at full staff since the early spring when our newest officer completed the police academy. This has allowed the Department to assign an additional officer to focus on follow-up and specialized investigations. In addition, the Department has focused extra efforts in an attempt to address our burgeoning traffic issues. Our Police Motorcycle program was utilized more than ever, patrolling over 12,000 miles and addressing neighborhood traffic problems whenever time would allow. Unfortunately, as the calls for service have increased, the ability to regularly devote adequate resources to traffic safety suffers. To address this problem in a more comprehensive manner, the Department has proposed a warrant article for 2006 to create a Traffic Safety Unit within the Department. This unit would consist of an officer dedicated to performing traffic safety tasks, including enforcement, education, and planning. This would, for the first time, recognize the importance of the traffic safety function in local policing, and would work proactively to address a problem that is affecting the quality of life in the community.

The School Resource Officer program continues to develop into an effective tool for providing a high level of safety in our

schools, while also providing services to our children. The two officers, assigned to the middle school and the high school, have become a part of the school community, and recent student/parent/teacher surveys were outstanding in their assessment of the two. This year a greater effort is being made to share these officers with the elementary grades to provide new safety programs on various topics in those schools.

Successful policing involves a partnership between the community and the police department. The eyes and ears of our citizens, when committed to working with the police, create the best opportunity to maintain the *small town feel* within our community, even as it grows. We strongly encourage citizens to report suspicious or unsafe activity as it occurs, and to take ownership in the type of community you want Amherst to be. We also are always looking for new and better ways to deliver a high level of police service to the Town of Amherst. We welcome your comments, ideas, and suggestions as to how we may better serve you.

As always, the police department wishes to express our appreciation to the other town departments and employees, particularly Fire, EMS, and DPW, for all their assistance during the year. The overall team spirit that is routinely demonstrated by town employees enables the high level of service provided to the community. In addition, the Department would like to thank the citizens of Amherst for the support, demonstrated in so many ways, for all of the members of the police department. We pledge our commitment to continuing to provide you the best possible service at the lowest possible cost over the next year.