

CAT. D – CRIME PREVENTION UNIT OF THE YEAR (SM. AGENCY)
COPPS UNIT, CLERMONT POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Clermont Police Departments Community Oriented Policing & Problem Solving Unit or COPPS took on a major crime prevention project, the Oakhurst Project, while continuing to reach out across their entire community with a strong crime prevention message. The Clermont Police Department is comprised of 73 sworn officers of which 6 are assigned to the COPPS unit along with 1 civilian, a Lieutenant and Captain who are charged with teaching their approximately 37,000 residents about crime prevention.

Chief Broadway is a big believer in community outreach knowing that the more engaged his office is with the community the safer their community will be; therefore, you will often find him at the various outreach events in the City of Clermont. Both the COPPS Unit and the Chief are heavily involved in many charity walks and runs held throughout the year as well as other special events and fundraisers. Wherever there is a gathering of people you will find the COPPS unit doing what they do best, interacting with members of the community.

The COPPS unit works with everyone from those afflicted with Alzheimer's disease or dementia to young children.

They partnered with their local Alzheimer Resource Center to locate and register those individuals who have Alzheimer's disease or dementia. Through this outreach they are able to share safety and security tips with the individual and their caregiver while registering them for their wanderer's program.

Every Wednesday, you will find them hosting a bicycle helmet safety check, offering free helmets to those children who do not have one and sharing bicycle safety information with the children and parents in attendance. Their goal is to make sure no child goes without a bicycle helmet!

In this day and age where so many people are selling items on E-bay, Craigslist, Facebook and any other social media site they took the initiative to designate a "Safe Zone Transactions" site in front of the police station where there is 24-hour video surveillance. Many citizens take advantage of this safe place to meet a stranger to buy or sell items.

In addition, to these specialized programs they also offer the traditional crime prevention programs such as Identity Theft Prevention.

Their biggest crime prevention project is the Oakhurst Project. Oakhurst is a 14-unit housing complex that had become run down and crime ridden; where the residents were afraid to leave their homes due to the drug-dealing and assaults. This neighborhood had the highest number of calls for service in Clermont. When traditional policing did not work the COPPS unit met with the Chief to propose a more aggressive community oriented approach. They held community meetings at a nearby church, met with landlords, and reached out to local businesses and organizations for help. More than 150 volunteers came from across the country to give of their time and resources to clean and beautify the neighborhood and homes, build a sense of community and provide a safe environment for the residents. Everything was progressing nicely when a murder took place, but instead of being a setback it proved that what they were doing was working. They experienced an outpouring of support and cooperation and were able to identify two suspects who were arrested. This support and cooperation meant the project was working, the COPPS unit stepped up their walk and talks and community interaction. The landlords even took note and began evicting people who were not complying with their contracts. There were no overnight, immediate changes; it took over a year to make all of these changes. Now they

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receive very few calls for service from Oakhurst and the calls they do receive are for information or proactive calls about distributing food and other projects to improve the neighborhood. The Oakhurst Project resulted in a 90% drop in reported crimes in Oakhurst and created a safer, friendlier neighborhood at no cost to the city and Clermont PD. Time, labor, supplies and even the food to feed the volunteers and residents were all donated.

It is my honor to recognize the Clermont Police Departments Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving (COPPS) Unit as the 2018 Florida Crime Prevention Association's Crime Prevention Unit of the Year from a small agency.