

# ON TARGET

A Quarterly Publication of the Metropolitan Police Department

Volume 1 • Issue 1 October 2009

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Solving the Shaquita Bell Case

Taking the Paperwork Out of Policing

MPD Embraces Social Networking

The Dual Life of Rob Baechtel

Taking Charge of Nuisance Properties

## Flying High

**I've Always Been Committed to Serving**

Reserve Sergeant Rob Baechtel helps protect Washington's skies by day, the city's streets by night

# [contents]

FALL 2009 • VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1



## Taking the Paperwork Out of Policing

New technologies save time and give officers more tools to fight crime

6



## Cold Case: Bringing Closure for One Family

Shaquita Bell's murder haunted Jackie Winborne for more than 13 years

8



## Putting a Face on the Law

MPD is using social networking to connect with the community it serves

10



## Keeping the Public in the Know

The city's Alert DC system provides real-time data on crime and more

11



## Drug Properties on the Hot List

A joint effort between MPD, OAG and the USAO addresses nuisances across the city

14

## FROM THE CHIEF

# Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of *Bullet Points*. With this new publication, the Department is embarking on a new frontier for us — to give the general public a chance to get to know the stories of the men and women who make up the rank and file of the police force in the Nation's Capital. Our goal is to give our readers a unique perspective on the lives of the people who protect and serve the 600,000 residents of the capital city, 1.5 million commuters and guests, and nearly 22 million visitors to this most unique of cities.

I am extraordinarily proud of all of the 4,000 dedicated police officers and the nearly 700 civilian support personnel who make up DC's finest. We are fortunate to have some of the best and brightest in law enforcement and are honored to serve you every day.

I hope that you'll enjoy reading the profiles and perspectives offered here and gain a better understanding of how policing works and what makes these men and women tick. With each quarterly edition, these pages will give you insight into what we're doing to make our streets as safe as possible — we'll show you how we're using new technologies, training, and innovative programs to build the best agency we can be. And we'll also share some of the untold stories of these brave men and women. We look forward to hearing your thoughts on this first edition and welcome your ideas for future topics.

*Cathy L. Lanier*

Cathy L. Lanier  
Chief of Police



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*We appreciate your interest and contributions to make our publication better.*

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ON THE COVER: Rob Baechtel looks over the city he helps protect from Reagan National Airport's tower.

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# MPD Encourages All of Its Members to Be 'Losers'

BY DR. LAURIE SAMUEL

THE DEPARTMENT LAUNCHED ITS FIRST-EVER "Biggest Loser Fitness Challenge" on June 10, 2009. MPD members who attended the Kick-Off event at the Metropolitan Police Academy (MPA) were treated to fitness demonstrations, healthy food samplings, and health screenings.

The 'Biggest Loser' Fitness Challenge was a free eight-week step challenge with a healthy dose of competition. The 600-plus challenge participants formed 189 teams and strapped on running shoes and pedometers to take over 127 million steps.

The team concept also helped increase motivation and commitment among members:

*It has been great!! I did not want to be the weak link of the group since I am the oldest; and I have not been (smile). I can see a change for the better, I have more energy, my clothes fit better, I eat more [healthily], and, last but not least, drink water instead of sodas. The time has gone by so fast, our group "We're In This Together" [is] planning on keeping it up for a better and healthier life style.*

Team Name	Total Team Weight Loss (lbs)	Average % Loss Per Team Member
Who Dat?	78.8	8.4
Four Amigos	69.0	8.0
Menace 2 Society	64.6	6.9
The PHAT and the Furious	63.6	7.3
Team Awesome Commando Force	60.8	6.7
Sharkey's Losers	49.0	6.1
The "Weight is Over"	39.5	4.4
3D Substation Divas	39.1	4.7
1/2 a Ton of Fun	38.4	5.2
Team SLU	35.2	7.1

MPD partnered with the Wellness Institute at Providence Hospital for the Step Challenge and they offered workshops on stress management, financial management, and nutrition throughout the eight-week program. Bodies transformed and attitudes changed. And 'Biggest Loser' program participants appeared happier as a result of the mental and physical changes. Another participant noted the following:

*This has been more than just an experience — it is a life-changing experience.*

*This challenge and my team have motivated me to take good care of myself and help others to do the same. Carol Welch once said, "Movement is a medicine for creating change in a person's physical, emotional, and mental states." I plan to keep on moving.*

The Fitness Challenge officially ended on August 10, 2009. Weights were calculated and congratulations are in order. Individual and team results are quite spectacular, with the winning team dropping an average of 8.4% of their body weight each, for a total of 78.8 pounds lost. Congratulations to all of the competitors on these remarkable accomplishments. See the chart above to see how the rest of the Challengers stacked up.

It's not over, however. The eight-week Fitness challenge laid the groundwork for an overall MPD wellness program. More activities and events are being planned for the coming weeks and months. Chief Lanier hopes members stay motivated and looks forward to the next phase. 🌐

*Dr. Laurie Samuel serves as the manager of the Supervisory Support Program as a member of the Human Resource Management Division.*



The overall winning team of *Who Dat?* poses at the weigh-in kickoff ceremony in June at the Metropolitan Police Academy (from left): Assistant Chief Alfred Durham, Ms. Betty Williams, Mr. George Bolden, and Mr. Matt Bromeland.

# I've Always Been Committed to Serving

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEVIN PALMER

ROB BAECHTEL GETS UP PRETTY EARLY in the morning. He leaves his Hillcrest home at 5:30 AM to make the short commute across the river to one of the most interesting jobs Washington has to offer. Baechtel is an air traffic controller at one of the busiest urban airports in the country. As an operator there for two decades, he has been witness to some of the region's — and nation's — biggest moments. Baechtel grew up in the Washington area, living and working in the region he has loved all his life.



I meet Baechtel on the mezzanine level on a Friday morning. From the moment we shake hands, it's evident that he really enjoys what he does. He takes me up the elevator to the 13th floor of the air traffic tower at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, the clumsy appellation Congress added to the area's smallest — but perhaps most beloved — airport. There, a small break room affords controllers respite from the hive of activity just upstairs. On this morning, one young controller is enjoying one of the various remakes of a sci-fi movie before he heads back to work. Up a narrow, winding staircase and through a small door, we enter the nerve center of the operation. The weather is clear and mostly sunny, a good day for flying.



The view from the tower at Reagan National Airport.

The large glass panels of the tower's windows give its occupants a 360-degree view of Washington's skyline and planes on approach to one of the diminutive airport's three runways. The main pavement for most large aircraft is Runway 01, which cuts a nearly perfect north-south path across the narrow isthmus of land that sits along the Potomac River where National was sited in 1939 and opened in 1941. Runway 01 — “O-one” in pilot speak — is just over a mile in length, just long enough to accommodate today's modern jetliners. Two smaller runways angle across Runway 01, providing additional patches of asphalt to handle the airfield's smaller planes, or to give options for those pilots daring enough to take off or land on the shortest runway in the FAA's realm. Wind conditions play the biggest factor in determining a runway assignment, but controllers make effective use of all three to help distribute the more than 277,000 takeoffs and landings each year. The airport moves more than 18 million people, 30,000 pounds of mail, and 7.2 million pounds of freight annually. Baechtel serves with an elite group of men and women who ensure the safety of all of this activity every day.

Baechtel explains that a lot has changed in the tower at National since September 11. The controllers there no longer track flights from their origin, but begin direct communications with approaching flights at about 7 to 10 miles from touchdown. He shows me the flight numbers — printed on thin strips of paper called flight progress strips that pop out of a machine mounted near the center of the octagonal room. The slip gets placed in a plastic carrier,

which contains the relevant details of each flight on approach — call sign, aircraft type, airline, and origin, along with other information helpful to guiding the plane safely into the airport — and carried to the first station. An operator there handles the plane through its approach until it touches the runway. Once safely stopped, a ground controller acts like a traffic cop, guiding the plane safely on the taxiways and into the appropriate gate.



Born and raised in Kensington, a half-square mile town just a mile north of the Washington beltway, Baechtel went to Catholic school until the eighth grade. After his father died when Baechtel was 15, the family moved to West Virginia. During his high school years there, Baechtel volunteered with the local emergency squad as an EMT. Having gained experience, and interest, in helping people, Baechtel wanted to be a para-rescue specialist. At 18, he enlisted with the US Air Force with the goal of learning this specialized skill. Unfortunately, the school for para-rescue was closed shortly after he finished boot camp, so he diverted his attention to air traffic control, “mostly because I love seeing airplanes.” Baechtel began his air traffic career as a controller assigned to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware. When the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization went on strike in August 1981, President Reagan fired 80 percent of the civilian workforce across the country.

The Air Force loaned 1,300 controllers to the Federal Aviation Administration to keep the airports running. Baechtel was one of them — and he was given the opportunity to return home, assigned to then-National Airport. Working at the little, but extremely important airport, Baechtel enjoyed being a part of the excitement. “It's such a vital area, where everything is happening ... events that you see on the nightly news are



Rob Baechtel sits atop the world at Washington's busy Reagan National Airport during the day. At night, he helps keep the streets of Washington safe as a volunteer police officer with the Metropolitan Police Department.

happening in D.C. I get to see them from a bird's eye view, looking down."

After his enlistment ended two years later, he tried different careers, including as a police officer with the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission Park Police in Prince George's County and as the Director of Animal Control for the City of Gaithersburg, MD. He landed at National Airport permanently in 1989 and serves as the liaison point for the Washington Area Helicopter Users Group, an organization that brings together all of the different customers of the FAA and helps establish safety procedures that allow over 60 different organizations to operate effectively in one of the most complex, tightly-controlled airspaces in the world. It's an invigorating profession, to say the least. "You have to keep your head on a swivel and constantly be looking out the window and evaluating different things," Baechtel says. "You have to look at the entire situation and see the big picture. It's an exciting job."

Throughout his career, service — and helping others — has been a theme. "I have a passion to help people," he says.



Baechtel became a Reserve Police Officer in 1996, becoming a Sergeant in 2005. He concentrates his weekend patrols in the First District. "It's chaos, but it's beautiful."

Perhaps as a result of this passion, Baechtel was drawn to an extracurricular career that has kept him busy patrolling the streets of Chinatown and other parts of D.C. since 1996. The Department's helicopter was based at National for many years. With Baechtel's liaison role to all of the airport's users, he got to know many of MPD's team, eventually being convinced to go through the Academy and join as a volunteer, giving more than 40 hours per month of his time to help protect the streets of Washington. In nearly 14 years of service, he's missed only a few weekends of patrolling.

His two careers have enabled him to feed this passion. "Just like we help lost pilots here, we help lost people downtown — it's a very vibrant situation." With his helicopter experience, Baechtel was instrumental in helping the Department re-

**CONTINUES ON PAGE 12**



# New System Helps Officers Focus on Policing, Not Paperwork

TEXT BY ANNE GRANT

POLICE OFFICERS HAVE one of the most paper-intensive occupations in the world. Every interaction they have with the public requires some sort of documentation — from arrests to a simple “contact” in which an officer greets a neighbor on the street, he or she must fill out a form. For years, the Department has attempted to build an automated system to replace all the mundane, time-intensive paperwork officers have to fill out for each event. With the implementation of the Automated Field Reporting System (AFRS) — the first module that will fit within the larger Records Management System (or, RMS) framework — on April 6, 2009, MPD initiated paperless reporting for the first time, and there is no turning back.

The AFRS module replaces the current paper-based police forms (PD Form 251 and PD Form 252 reports). Many of the features presented in this module — including the user interface, the introduction of Inboxes and routing queues, and the use of mandatory fields and error checking to improve the accuracy of the data — will carry through as MPD adds modules to the RMS.

In four short months, approximately 30,000 reports have been entered into the AFRS by over 2,000 members. The effort has been led by a team of people within the Department who were charged with helping to bring the agency into the 21st Century and making the officers’ jobs easier. The talented group includes civilian, sworn and contract staff working in the Office of the Chief Information Officer and Crime Data Quality Branch. The initial feedback they’ve received from those using the new application has been encouraging. Members are excited to have a “one stop shop” to enter information to populate many of their paper-based forms at the same time. One officer wrote, “I like [the AFRS] ... automation is wonderful and has a lot of time and cost savings.”

Another component of the RMS is the City Service Request utility. The tool provides an easy-to-use system and enables MPD members to report issues that may be contributing to an environment that promotes criminal activity, such as broken street lights, missing stop signs, overgrown shrubbery, abandoned vehicles, and

## Better Reports, Fewer Trees

The RMS will eventually include many other applications that currently operate separately, such as:

- **Arrest and Booking** This will eventually replace the current Criminal Justice Information System, which has been around since the early 1990s.
- **Property and Evidence** This new component will replace the outdated AEGIS system.
- **Investigative Case Management** A new tool will replace the Washington Area Criminal Information and Incident System (WACIIS), a clearinghouse of investigative information shared by law enforcement in the city.
- **Juvenile Case Management** A replacement for an application that helps track those under the age of 18 charged with misdemeanors and other crimes as well as juvenile victims of crime

more. Once an officer enters the information, it is immediately shared with partner agencies such as the Department of Public Works, District Department of Transportation, or the Water and Sewer Authority for action. Such collaborative measures help reduce the potential for criminal activity by removing elements commonly associated with quality-of-life crimes: dark streets, broken utilities, parks in disrepair, and so on. Such efforts benefit the whole community as residents appreciate the fixes and criminals feel less welcome.

When the RMS and AFRS are fully implemented, MPD’s officers will benefit from a greatly simplified way of accomplishing daily tasks. The streamlined process will help officers return to patrolling and making our streets safer more quickly than ever and ensure that the information they capture is more accurate, yielding stronger cases for prosecution. 🌐

Anne Grant is the civilian Director of Crime Data Quality for the Department.

The screenshot displays the RMS web application. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like 'Home', 'My Records', 'Records Search', 'How Port Forms', 'Reports', 'User Help', and 'City Service Requests (11 of 11)'. Below this, a table lists various service requests with columns for FORM, DISTRICT, PSA, LOCATION, REQUEST TYPE, DATE, TIME, STATUS, and REPORTING. A 'City Service Request' dialog box is open, showing a list of request types such as 'Abandoned Vehicles', 'Alley Cleaning', 'Alley Lights', 'Alley Repair', 'Curb & Gutter Repair', 'Dead Animal', 'Graffiti', 'Grass & Weeds Mowing', 'Illegal Dumping', 'Other', 'Potholes', 'Rat Abatement', 'Sanitation Enforcement', 'Sidewalk Repair', and 'Signs - Street'. The 'Details' section on the right shows information for a 'Dead Animal' request, including the location '2000 block of Constitution Ave NE' and the reporting member 'SIMMONS JR, ENRIQUE'.

The Records Management System includes a tool to report problems within neighborhoods. Above, the main screen shows current requests and the ability to view details. New requests are created using the form (above center) via a set of pull-down menus.

# Junior Police Academy Brings Real-World Experience to Internships

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY YVONNE SMITH

WHAT A SUMMER! In late May, Chief Lanier and Mayor Fenty discussed ways the police department could engage a group of teens in conjunction with the mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). The Chief immediately began promoting the program. The day before the Safe Summer kickoff, Chief Lanier and Donnie Simpson promoted the program on the radio. That evening, another radio station had picked up the story. The following day, Channel 4 was advertising the Jr. Police Academy, a new summer program MPD would offer for youth who are normally interested in the law, criminal justice system, and politics.

A few weeks later, MPD welcomed the newest members of the police department. Students of the Jr. Police Academy — dubbed "A Look Into the Law" — had come from schools all over the city. "The ten-week program was never without drama," says Ms. Smith. On the first full day of class, a student, who appeared to be lost, was asked a simple question; "young lady, what is your name?" When she recited her first and last name, another student jumped up in the back of the class and yelled, "Say what!"

We had no idea why this name was so disturbing to her, until we learned that she, too, shared the same first and last name. These two strangers later learned that their grandfathers were brothers and became good friends during the ten-week course.

Also during that time, students met with judges, a lawyer from the U.S. Attorney's Office, lawyers from the Office of the Attorney General; they took a boat ride with MPD's Harbor Patrol Unit; they visited the Crime & Punishment and the Spy Museums; they learned from detectives about



The Junior Police Academy visits with the Department's SWAT team.



homicide investigations; they visited the Medical Examiner's Office and the Forensic Science Division; they visited MPD's Fingerprinting and Firearms Examination Divisions; they toured the Office of Unified Communications and saw, first hand, who's taking 9-1-1 calls and what resources were available

to the call takers; they met Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, the Mayor and the Chief during All Hands on Deck; they took a life-saving skills course; they learned about computer crimes and Internet predators; they visited a local university and heard from a government official on free money for college for DC's youth; they learned about the exciting work of the Emergency Response Team and re-

ceived a visit from members of the DNA lab in Lorton. They visited a million dollar home and participated in man-to-man and lady-to-lady discussions with police executives. Stereotypes were shattered; barriers were broken; and teens got to spend ten weeks in a program that paid them money, but also, taught them about life, choices and friendships. More importantly, each and every one of them received special attention from officers who showed them that behind the uniforms, they are people who were fun and who genuinely cared about their well being.



"You keep talking about our ten-year reunion as if it were tomorrow," said student worker, Johnathan. "We promise you, we will be there and we will be successful," he stated, as he handed one of the program directors a thank-you gift during a ceremony to present the students with certificates of completion for the very first Jr. Police Academy. 🌐

Yvonne Smith is the civilian Director of Community Outreach.

# Making the Case: Closing a Homicide 13 Years Later

TEXT BY JIM TRAINUM

**H**OMICIDE CASES BECOME COLD for many reasons. Uncooperative witnesses and lack of physical evidence are just a couple. But even after many years things sometimes happen to make a cold case hot again. Witnesses may have a change in attitude, new forensic testing may become available or new eyes looking over the case may uncover a previously missed lead. But when the case begins with the victim going missing, and the body is never found, it takes all that and more, including a lot of teamwork and the perseverance of a grieving family to bring justice and closure.



Thomas and Jackie Winborne

Shaquita Bell's relationship with Michael Dickerson had always been a rocky one. The 23-year-old mother of three had filed several complaints of domestic violence against her boyfriend, the father of her youngest child and a well known and violent drug dealer in the District of Columbia. So it was with concern that Shaquita's parents watched as she drove away with Dickerson from her Alexandria, Virginia home on the afternoon of June 27, 1996.

When Shaquita failed to return home, her parents became concerned. Dickerson gave conflicting accounts as to what happened after they left her home, including one in which they argued and she left him from in front of his home in the 3200 block of G Street, SE.

Shaquita's family filed a missing person report with the Alexandria Police Depart-

ment. They also turned over her diary, which contained numerous entries outlining the violent acts committed upon Shaquita by Dickerson and expressing her fear of him. Realizing the seriousness of the situation, they contacted the MPD Homicide Unit.

The investigation got a break when a witness came forward. The witness told the police that a friend of Dickerson's known as Jody Shields told the witness that Dickerson had shot and killed Shaquita in his backyard. Dickerson had called Shields to come help get rid of the body. Detectives from the Metropolitan Police Department and Alexandria Police searched Dickerson's house. They found several .45-caliber shell casings in the back yard.

For many years, Shields was uncooperative but the detectives did not give up. Teaming up with Prince George's County detectives and prosecutors, they worked to insure that Dickerson was prosecuted for every criminal case that he had pending at that time. Because of their efforts, Dickerson was even successfully prosecuted in the domestic violence cases brought by Shaquita, even though she was not present to testify against him. The result of these multiple convictions was a sentence of several years in jail.

After her daughter's disappearance in 1996, Jackie Winborne kept the case alive by holding vigils and speaking out whenever possible.

Finally, in 1999 Shields agreed to cooperate. He confessed that he had helped to get rid of Shaquita's body. He said that he and Dickerson put her in the trunk of a car and drove out to a wooded section of Ft. Washington where they buried her. Shields agreed to cooperate and took the detectives out to where he believed they had buried. The area had changed since 1996 and Shields had some difficulty in locating the exact site. Bulldozers were brought in and a massive excavation done, but Shaquita's body was not found. Shield continued to cooperate and worked to help obtain evidence against Dickerson, but fell victim himself to murder a few months later.

With no further leads, the case went cold. But Shaquita mother and step-father, Jackie and Thomas Windborne would not be satisfied. They worked tirelessly to keep their daughter's case in the forefront of the news, holding yearly vigils in front of MPD Headquarters and speaking out whenever possible.

In June, 2007 Fox 5 News broadcast a story about the anniversary of Shaquita's disappearance. The story caught the eye of newly-appointed Chief Cathy Lanier, who asked to meet with the Winbournes. Dur-



IMAGE COURTESY JACKIE WINBORNE



ing that meeting, Chief Lanier decided that the Bell case warranted a fresh pair of eyes.

Major Case/Cold Case Detectives Anthony Brigidini and Kenneth (Todd) Williams were assigned the case. Teaming up with Assistant U.S. Attorney Amanda Haines they reviewed every aspect of the investigation. Where in the past prosecutors were hesitant to prosecute murder cases where the decedent's body remained missing, recent successful prosecutions strengthened the teams resolve. Additional investigation and search warrants turned up new witnesses, as well as additional evidence linking Dickerson to other murders. Armed with this new information, the detectives were able to charge Dickerson with the murder of Shaquita Bell. In a plea agreement, Dickerson admitted not only to the murder of Shaquita but the other murders as well. Dickerson agreed to show the detectives where he buried Shaquita, leading them back to the area that had been searched previously. Though this subsequent search still did not yield Shaquita's body, additional investigation revealed the possibility that roadwork and construction in the area may have significantly changed the landscape. This does not deter the detectives who just recently conducted another excavation in an attempt to locate Shaquita's body.

Though without Shaquita's body the Winbournes do not have total closure, they do have the satisfaction of knowing that her killer is being punished for his actions. And Shaquita's case brings hope to the families of the victim's of other unsolved homicides. Because as in her case the detectives of the Major Case/Cold Case Unit are constantly reviewing old cases – looking for that one missed lead, that one new clue that may bring closure to yet another family. ☺

*Jim Trainum has been a detective with the Metropolitan Police Department since 1983. He has been involved in the closure of such high-profile cases as the Georgetown Starbucks murders in 1997 and many others.*

TOP 10

## UNSOLVED HOMICIDES



H062-3170

### Christine Burke

AKA: Christine Baynard

On the morning of Monday, December 24th 1962 the body of Christine Burke, 38, was discovered in her apartment located in the 2700

block of 13th St. NE. She had been strangled to death. There were no signs of forced entry and nothing appeared to have been stolen. The motive for her murder remains unknown.



H082-1434

### James Thorpe

On Saturday, September 18, 1982 at approximately 11:45 pm James Thorpe, 64, was on duty as the manager of Ferguson's Sunoco, located at 115 Riggs Road, NE.

Two men entered the station and shot him to death. They then stole the money from the register and fled.



H093-1200

### Audrey Hamilton

Audrey, 18, was last seen the evening of Saturday, August 28, 1993 when she left her friend on

Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE to go home. Her body was found the next day in the rear of a house in the 600 block of Savannah St. SE. She had been raped and murdered.

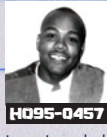


H094-0270

### Lawrence O'Connell

On Friday, February 25, 1994 Lawrence O'Connell, 35, was kidnapped when he left work at the Voice of America located at 4th and Independence Avenue, SW. Shortly

after his kidnapping, a short, white female with blond hair was seen using his ATM and credit cards. The next day, Mr. O'Connell was found beaten to death in the RFK Benning Road parking lot.



H095-0457

### Nathaddeus Smith

On Saturday, April 15, 1995 witnesses observed a Hispanic male chasing Nathaddeus Smith, 25, in the 1700 block of Kenyon St. NW. On catching up with him, the

two struggled, and the suspect stabbed Mr. Smith multiple times. After killing Mr. Smith the subject jumped into Mr. Smith's car and drove it away. It was recovered only a few blocks away.



H098-0586

### Mary Alice Pratt

On Wednesday, June 3, 1998 Mary Pratt, 83, was found beaten to death in her home located in the 1300 block of Emerald St. NE. Her children had been unable to reach her and came over to check on her welfare. It is believed that she was

killed in the course of a burglary/robbery as several items were missing from the house.



H002-0477

### Shawntel White

In the early morning hours of Wednesday, September 11, 2002 a group of people were standing in the 400 block of Manor Place, NW.

A car drove by and began shooting indiscriminately into the crowd. Shawntel White, 22, was struck by stray gunfire and killed.



H004-0304

### Kenneth Green and Kiysha Hunter

Kenneth Green, 20, and Kiysha Hunter, 29, were on their way home during the early morning hours of Monday,

August 30, 2004. Their car was stopped at a traffic light at 33rd Place and South Dakota Avenue, NE when they were shot multiple times and killed.



H099-0515

### Susan Noelle Cvengros

On Friday, May 21, 1999 Susan Cvengros, 24, was found murdered in her basement apartment located at 416 F Street, NW. There was no signs of forced entry and the motive remains unknown.



H005-0132

### Donte Ernest Manning

During the evening of March 24, 2005 Donte Manning, 9, was playing with friends outside of his home in the area of 13th and Euclid Streets, NW. A gunman began shooting into the crowd and struck Donte, killing him.

The cases listed above are some of the Homicide Branch's current open cases, chosen for their higher probability of solvability. But we need your help to close the case. If you have any information about any of these incidents, please contact MPD at (202) 727-9099 or (888) 919-CRIME (2746). You may be eligible for a cash reward of up to \$25,000 if the information leads to arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible. For more information on the MPD's Tip Rewards program, please see page 11.

# Putting a Face on the Law: MPD's Community Connections

TEXT BY KAYLIN CASTELLI

THE WEB IS ALWAYS CHANGING, and the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) is doing its part to keep up with the times by using some of the newer web technologies that are now available. In December 2008, the MPD joined the ranks of the social networkers when it established a group on the ubiquitous Facebook website.

Facebook is a popular social networking site that many people use to stay in touch with friends, family and classmates. In addition to connecting with, or "friending" people, users can support causes or organizations by joining "groups." These groups provide feeds into personal pages the same way a friend's information would feed into a personal page.

Facebook is yet another tool that the MPD uses to get important public safety and community policing information out to the community quickly and efficiently. The new MPD Facebook Group helps the MPD reach an audience of people who may not visit the MPD website regularly. If users join the MPD Facebook Group, they get safety tips, information about events that require police support, and much more. Users can comment on the MPD's postings and share ideas with other people who also support the Metropolitan Police Department.

When the MPD Facebook Group first launched, we offered safety tips for the holidays as well as a wealth of information to help people prepare for the Inauguration. Since then, we've posted police officer testing dates, civilian vacancy announcements, and community policing events, among other items. In June 2009, we added video to our page, including a special information video about HEROES (Honor Every Responsible Officer's Eternal Sacrifice) and a special Public Service Announcement produced by the MPD in partnership with members of the Go Go community. While new posts are added

regularly, these videos, as well as all old posts, are still available online.

The MPD encourages everyone to check out the *Washington Metropolitan Police Dept. Facebook* Group and share it with friends. Even if you don't become a fan, it's worth a visit every now and again.

If you already have a Facebook account, you can join MPD's Facebook Group by searching for **Washington Metropolitan Police Dept.** on the site. A shortcut to the MPD Facebook page can be found on the MPD's home page at <http://mpdc.dc.gov>. To join Facebook, visit <http://www.facebook.com>.

*Kaylin Castelli, a civilian member of the Department, manages MPD's web-based communications.*

## Let's Face It

MPD has begun using social networking tools to connect with the community we serve. To date, more than 1,500 "fans" follow the musings and postings of the agency, including special events, notices, and alerts to our Facebook page. The Department is also exploring using other social media tools and technology to ensure that the public has access to the most current, accurate information about crime and crime prevention in Washington, DC. If you have suggestions on ways we can improve our communications, please let us know by joining our Facebook page.



The Department's presence on Facebook has allowed the agency to keep more than 1,500 "fans" in the know about various events and activities



# Rapid Information Helps Keep Public Informed, Get Tips on Crime in Real Time

TEXT BY KEVIN PALMER

COMPLAINANT REPORTS THAT HE WAS WALKING IN FRONT of the listed location when Suspect 1 approached him from behind and grabbed him by the throat, stating "Give me your wallet!" The complainant complied and started walking away when Suspect 2 ran toward him and stated, "Give me your cell phone!" Once again, the complainant complied. The suspects fled the scene in an unknown direction.

This sort of incident is not uncommon on the streets of D.C. But what happened next is what police and the dispatchers who help them patrol our neighborhoods hope will make a difference in quickly solving these sorts of cases. A short time after the robbery occurred, the suspects were apprehended and positively identified by the complainant. How did police manage to catch the two young perpetrators so quickly? Dispatchers in the Office of Unified Communications received two calls to 9-1-1 shortly after the robbery took place — one from a witness to the actual incident, and one from an observer who received a text message alert about the robbery minutes after it occurred.

The first caller provided a description of the two young men after witnessing the robbery occur; the other gave a description of two subjects he saw running from the area where it took place. Armed with this information, police patrolling in the area were able to quickly locate and stop the two suspects. The suspects — just 18 and 19 years old — were positively identified by the victim and arrested for Robbery-Fear.

The program that made this possible is known as the Alert DC system — which provides timely alerts to subscribers on various aspects of the city's public works, transportation, and public safety networks. Subscribers to the free service receive real-time updates about events such as street closures, water main breaks, severe weath-

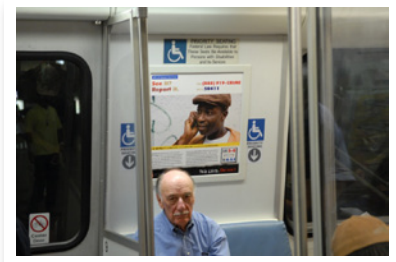
er, violent crimes in a chosen Police Service Area, and other useful information.

This system delivers important emergency alerts, notifications and updates on a range of devices including subscribers' e-mail accounts, cell phones, pagers, BlackBerrys, or other wireless PDAs. When an incident or emergency occurs, authorized DC Homeland Security & Emergency Management personnel rapidly notify subscribers to the service using this community alert system. Alert DC provides a personal connection to real-time updates, instructions on where to go, what to do, or what not to do, who to contact and other important information. To subscribe, visit <http://72hours.dc.gov>.



Have information for police?  
**CALL (888) 919-CRIME**  
**TEXT TO 50-411**

The Alert DC system rapidly provides citizens with information to help them protect themselves and their families. But another tool enables private citizens to help prevent and solve crimes by providing information to the police. In this case, a concerned citizen called police when they saw something suspicious and had information that could be useful in solving a crime. Another way to provide information to police is through the anonymous crime tip lines — a standard phone number and a text number — where individuals can share information quickly and safely with police. The call-in number — (888) 919-CRIME (2746) — and the text number — 50411 — were launched in 2008 to make it convenient to share information with police



IMAGES COURTESY CBS OUTDOOR

A recent transit campaign on the anonymous tip lines increased calls by 35 percent.

anonymously. The tip line is staffed by detectives 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Anyone who has information concerning a homicide, gangs, guns, or other violent offenses can call the anonymous tip line, and a detective will report all information to the appropriate parties for follow-up.





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establish the Air Support Unit, now based on South Capitol Street. He continues to work closely with the officers and sergeant responsible for maintaining the fleet of two birds — known by their call signs as “Falcon 1” and “Falcon 2.” He assists with training and procedural issues and works closely to ensure the program’s safety, which he takes very seriously. It’s an issue a career in air traffic control has given him an unyielding attitude toward.

The MedEvac accident — in which a Maryland State Trooper helicopter went down in stormy weather in 2008 — touched Baechtel personally. He knew the pilots who perished in the crash and was involved in the investigation aftermath. Tragedy struck close once before when on November 22, 1994, his cousin, Martha Dixon Martinez, was killed during a shooting at police headquarters. Martinez was an FBI agent who was working with Detective Sergeant Hank Daly and fellow agent Michael J. Miller when an armed man entered the building, stormed the Homicide Branch, and opened fire. The incident spawned a new appreciation in Baechtel for police and encouraged him to become a founding member of Concerns of Police Survivors, an organization that raises money to support the families of fallen police and firefighters in the Washington area.

Baechtel thrives on the camaraderie and energy that both of his careers afford him: “You see instantly the results of your decision,” he says. “There’s a lot of camaraderie and a feeling that we’re all in this together.”

Baechtel felt that camaraderie in a profound way during this year’s Presidential Inaugural in January. He was one of the more than 8,000 police officers helping manage the record crowds in sub-freezing weather that day. His assignment brought him to the mouth of the I-395 tunnel, which was closed to vehicles for the day to help circulate the estimated 1.5 million people in town from one side of the parade route to the other, under Washington’s National Mall.

During the crush of activity, a 72-year-old woman suffered a heart attack inside the



Baechtel patrols the Chinatown beat, part of the First District, every Friday and Saturday night.

tunnel. Sergeant Baechtel saw the woman fall and immediately made his way over to her. After voicing a call for medical attention over his radio, he began administering cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Large crowds and closed roads combined to keep the ambulance crew from arriving quickly; Baechtel performed CPR for 35 minutes. When EMTs got to the scene, they used an automated external defibrillator to resuscitate the woman. That particular moment was just one of many such events in his career that have kept Baechtel coming back for more. Among his stand-out memories he counts the Air Florida crash in January 1982, the tragic events of September 11, four inaugurations, and countless other special events.

When asked about why he chooses to be a police officer in Washington, D.C., he deadpans: “if you’re gonna go skiing, you don’t go to Kansas.” The excitement and energy, the juxtaposition of the federal presence with a living, breathing city, and the sense that “something’s always happening” give Baechtel and the thousands of other members of the law enforcement in D.C. a sense that they’re in a special place. “I take pride in keeping it special, safe. It’s a place worth protecting and preserving for others to enjoy.”

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ON A SATURDAY NIGHT IN SEPTEMBER, Baechtel allows me to tag along as he patrols the pulsing streets of Chinatown. I meet him at the newly-opened First District headquarters, which serves as home base for the largest patrol district in the city. As we turn from Delaware Avenue onto I Street, SW, a call comes across the radio for a “10-33” at the L’Enfant Plaza station. Sergeant Baechtel radios his intentions to respond and blazes a trail to the station, just a few blocks away. The call — which alerts police to an officer needing help — turned out to be under control. Baechtel explains that Metro Transit Police had handled a group of rowdy teenagers who were involved in an altercation on the platform.

The situation cleared, Baechtel points his cruiser toward 7th Street, NW, and we park near the epicenter of nightlife on Saturday evenings, hard by the Verizon Center. It’s quiet tonight, he explains. The usual crowd of teenagers is gathered on the steps of the National Portrait Gallery, just across the street, site of an earlier scuffle between two groups of kids. Baechtel joined Metro Transit officers and

CONTINUES ON PAGE 13

# Omnibus Act Helps Sharpen City's Crime-Fighting Tools

TEXT BY KELLY O'MEARA

**T**HE DC COUNCIL PASSED THE OMNIBUS PUBLIC SAFETY AND JUSTICE AMENDMENT ACT of 2009 (or "the Act") on July 31, a sweeping anti-crime bill that is the culmination of a comprehensive and collaborative effort begun over a year earlier. The Metropolitan Police Department, the Office of the Attorney General, and the U.S. Attorney's Office worked together tirelessly to develop this bill. In drafting the Omnibus, the Administration drew upon the considerable experience of the District's public servants, the strong and consistent voice of the community, experts in the field, and the ideas and experiences of other jurisdictions. The Act, as passed, will help the District of Columbia combat gun crime and other violent crime at every step in the criminal justice process.

After its first introduction in October 2008, the Administration continued to refine and improve the Omnibus based on comments and questions from members of the Council, public and key stakeholders, community members, and advocates. Many of the recommendations for revisions and clarifications to the legislation were adopted in the final version. The end result is a bill that has been widely vetted, is even stronger than it was at its first introduction, and enjoys broad support.

"This bill is not a panacea that will put an end to the violence," says Chief Cathy L. Lanier, "but I do firmly believe it will help

to prevent homicides." The Act will help the District's criminal justice system in charging and detaining people with illegal guns or using a stolen car to commit robberies, drive-by shootings, or other violent crimes. It will help to ensure that repeat violent offenders are not quickly returned to our neighborhoods. With a new mandatory minimum three-year sentence, it may even make previously convicted violent felons think twice about carrying a gun on District streets. And fewer violent offenders with guns on our streets will translate into less violence and fewer homicides.

There is no way to measure the value of just one life saved. But certainly any calculation of the value of each homicide prevented should consider the value of a son or daughter who is able to grow up without the trauma of witnessing or being a survivor of homicide, neighborhoods that are no longer numb to violence, and community members who feel safe reporting serious crime.

The community has demonstrated that it is ready and willing to work with the police, prosecutors, and courts to keep our streets safe. The Omnibus Public Safety and Justice Amendment Act is part of Chief Lanier's commitment to ensure that the entire criminal justice system supports the community in this fight against violent crime. 🌐

*Kelly O'Meara is the civilian Director of the Office of Strategic Change, the unit within MPD which helps establish policy and direction for the agency in conjunction with the Mayor and city council.*

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2009 OMNIBUS CRIME BILL

- ▶ **Helps get violent gun offenders off our streets.** Supports pre-trial detention for offenders charged with serious crimes, so that they are not returned to our neighborhoods while awaiting trial. Increases the sentence for previously convicted felons in possession of a gun to a 3-year mandatory minimum if the previous conviction was for a violent felony. Requires convicted gun offenders to register with police to support supervision after release into the community.
- ▶ **Addresses violent crimes and the tools used to commit them.** Establishes a crime of illegal possession of a firearm in a vehicle and enhances the penalty for using a stolen vehicle to commit a crime of violence.
- ▶ **Combats witness intimidation.** Amends the statute to support an obstruction of justice charge against a person threatening to injure a witness.

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other MPD members in quelling the situation. For now, we walk up and down the strip of bars, restaurants, and stores which have sprouted all around the arena. As midnight approaches — D.C.'s curfew on Friday and Saturday nights — Baechtel checks in with other MPD officers and his friends at Transit, readying to disperse the teens who seem reticent to head home. At 11:59, Baechtel works with his counterparts to start moving any stragglers toward the Metro stations. One pair of young ladies resists his polite requests at first. He explains that if they get a ride on the curfew van, they will have to spend the evening in a police station until their parents pick them up. The logic convinces them to keep moving.

By 12:15, there's nearly no one on the sidewalks, save for bar-hoppers, office cleaners, and those down on their luck. Baechtel hops back in the car to patrol the "club zones," an area that stretches from downtown to the area north of Union Station. We ride around to check on some of his officers (as a sergeant, Baechtel helps manage the patrol teams when he's on duty), making sure they have what they need and that there's no trouble. He explains that a pair of clubs in the rapidly-changing NoMa neighborhood draw divergent crowds who often meet in the middle, often leading to violence in a shared parking lot. The lot is known as "The Cage" by officers who routinely work the detail. But tonight, Baechtel and some of the other MPD regulars hold fort as the clubs empty out. Aside from some grandstanding by a few car enthusiasts who linger in the lot to admire each other's cars, the mood is quiet this night.

But Baechtel assures me, it's not always so smooth. "One night, I was in this parking lot and saw this woman throw something into the bushes as I walked past." As he later determined she had marijuana on her, Baechtel began to question her. "She told me that I was infringing on her 'First Commandment rights.' I assured her that I was pretty certain that comes from a higher authority than me." 🌐

*Kevin Palmer handles internal and external communications for the Department as a civilian member of the Strategic Services Bureau.*



# Combating Drug Vice Properties Through Teamwork

TEXT BY CORALIE FARLEE

INITIATED BY MAYOR ADRIAN M. FENTY IN MAY 2007, the District's Nuisance Property Task Force handles certain types of nuisance properties that require significant interagency coordination. The task force includes representatives from The Office of the Mayor, Office of the Attorney General, Metropolitan Police Department, the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, the United States Attorney's Office, and the DC Housing Authority. MPD's efforts are coordinated by Assistant Chief Diane Groomes, who manages the Department's 2,000 patrol officers, and Inspector Brian Bray, the commander of the narcotics division. Since March, the innovative program has employed teamwork and collaboration between MPD Vice teams and the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) Assistant Attorneys General to close more than 240 nuisance properties. With seven teams — one for each police District — the Drug Vice Properties Project

consists of MPD vice officers and OAG attorneys working together to focus on drug vice properties that present the most serious problems in their communities.

Those properties which contain critical components, such as evidence witnesses, specific data, and impact status based on DC law — including property values, neighborhood conditions and related data such as extensive and serious calls for service by MPD — are able to go directly to DC Court by the AAGs. In other cases, problem tenants are removed with the help of personnel from the DC Housing Authority and other city agencies. In selected instances, MPD officers work with neighborhood residents, managers of housing complexes, and others to identify repeat problem offenders via search warrants which can produce evidence of drug paraphernalia and supplies including marijuana and large amounts of cash from proceeds of sales.

In still other properties, MPD makes continuing and regular contact with owners, property managers, residents, or knowledgeable neighborhood contacts. Properties are removed from the list for several reasons, including successful court proceedings, eviction of tenants, sale, closure, boarding up, or demolition of the property, and cessation of drug activity.

The issuance of Search Warrants and, especially those producing evidence of drug supplies, paraphernalia or large amounts of cash will land the property immediately on the "hot" list. The process requires coordination between OAG and MPD to issue warning letters to owners and constant monitoring by MPD officers. The latest hot list includes 269 properties in the six Districts that are being closely monitored. One hundred and seventy cases have been opened — or added to the list — between

CONTINUES ON PAGE 15







Inspector Brian Bray scans a report on a nuisance property to add to the list of "hot" properties.

#### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

March and September 2009. The Second District has been "drug vice property free" for several months. On average, the OAG files about two new cases per month.

At each joint quarterly meeting, MPD identifies the five highest-priority, or "hot" properties, to be given special attention over the next few months. Between these quarterly meetings, monthly listings are shared by OAG AAGs with relevant MPD officers for their latest information and recommendations for AAG attention. This is proving to be a very useful tool and method of more tightly coordinating action on these properties: the current lists replace two different lists previously maintained both by the MPD and OAG. In addition, individual MPD officers and AAG attorneys communicate regularly and now are able quickly to identify appropriate witnesses for court cases and other action.

Inspector Brian S. Bray, Commanding Officer of MPD's Narcotics and Special Investigations Division says, "The Drug Vice Properties Project that was initiated in January of 2009 is an improved collaboration between MPD and the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) in dealing

with nuisance properties that involve drugs or prostitution." He attributes the success of the program to efforts being made to build strong working relationships between MPD Vice officials/officers and the AAGs who are responsible for the abatement of nuisance properties. The rapid exchange of information regarding nuisance properties is also a critical element

of this program. Whenever a law enforcement action is taken in regards to a vice-related nuisance property, or intelligence is obtained about a nuisance property, MPD members must quickly forward this information to the OAG for appropriate follow-up. This timely exchange of information allows the OAG time to prepare its case against the owner/responsible party of the nuisance property for possible legal action that would result in the abatement of the nuisance. Bray says, "Under this program, the close working relationships and quick exchange of information between MPD and the OAG allow both agencies of the DC Government to develop specific action

plans to address problem locations in the most efficient and expeditious manner."

Tannisha D. Bell, one of the AAGs in the Neighborhood and Victim Services Unit of the OAG, agrees. Prior to the new partnership, many of her cases would go "cold" because of slower coordination between the two agencies. "The joint efforts of the MPD and the OAG to address drug nuisance properties in the District not only make sense, but they are proving to be effective," she says. "As we further develop this initiative and increase the communication between both agencies, we can only expect

to see more positive results. The results are noted whenever community members or property owners say 'thank you' for informing them of the problem and for ridding the community of drug houses."

Bell is quick to point out that the success of the partnership relies on continued cooperation. "Information sharing does not stop once the search warrant is executed. Some of the best evidence and information comes from officers who are familiar with nuisance properties through their beats, community complaints, and personal observations," she says. These officers provide valuable information on the individuals who frequent the location (drug dealers, prostitutes, gang members, etc.) and the general effect that the nuisance property is having on the community. Though this information is not always included in search warrants, it is very helpful and even crucial in addressing nuisance properties. Bell continues, "Having more information and knowledge about a nuisance property strengthens our cases and makes it easier to convince the judge to grant our requests. With our continued efforts we will send a message to both landlords and tenants that illegal activity will not be tolerated."

Assistant Chief Groomes indicates that through this very effective program, the city is making great progress. She has found that properties are being much more quickly removed from the "hot properties" list. Thanks to the Drug Vice Properties Project, the city is helping communities fight back in their effort to create safer neighborhoods. By removing the source of problems for many blocks — a problem house or drug den — many other quality-of-life issues can also be removed or diminished. Neighbors report seeing fewer people washing cars and loitering in their blocks after a nuisance property has been abated by the project, urinating in alleys and other behaviors that typically are associated with abandoned or drug-related properties. This kind of success helps make a neighborhood more vibrant and healthy for everyone. 🌐

*Coralie Farlee is a volunteer with the Senior Citizen Police Academy, helping with various aspects of the Department's efforts in community policing.*

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*With our continued efforts, we will send a message to both landlords and tenants that illegal activity will not be tolerated.*

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## LOOKING BACK

# The End of the Line

## How MPD Closed a W. Virginia Train Robbery

TEXT BY KEVIN PALMER AND REMI WINSTON

In 1949, two bandits from Youngstown, Ohio boarded The Ambassador, a Baltimore and Ohio passenger train heading from Washington to Detroit. On March 9, the men worked their way through the train carrying nearly 150 passengers as it left Martinsburg, West Virginia. The men, former convicts, pistol-whipped several passengers and crew, shot at others, and robbed dozens of passengers, making off with about \$1,500 in the heist. The robberies caused quite a stir, likening the event to the Jesse James-led capers of the 1870s Wild West. But the duo in this case were 20-year-old George L. Ashton and 23-year-old Luman C. Ramsdell. Tremendous cooperation between police agencies from West Virginia to Leesburg to Washington, DC helped bring the two robbers to justice just a day after the evening robberies. After the two forced a train conductor to back the train up to a siding about a mile back near a grade crossing, where they exited and stole several automobiles as they made their escape. Martinsburg police

authorities in the District that the perpetrators were likely headed east to Washington. A suspicious bus driver, the proprietor of a mountainside restaurant, a deputy sheriff in Leesburg and an FBI agent all figured in the capture of the two suspects.

Thanks to this cooperation, the two young robbers were found the next day at the S&W Pawnbrokers Exchange Co. in the 2100 block of Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. Their capturers, Pvts. James D. Kennedy and Elwood G. Lomax, were honored as policemen of the month for their remarkable capture. They were presented with a merit medal and certificates in a Baltimore and Ohio dining car on track 20 at Union Station. Ramsdell was shot by Private Lomax when he drew a weapon as he was being arrested. He was hospitalized at Gallinger Hospital where he suffered from a stomach wound,

The engineers of The Ambassador who were forced to back the train up to a grade crossing.

but later recovered. At their arraignment, the pair pleaded guilty to obstructing the train route by stopping the train and robbing two passengers. The first charge, violation of the "antiracketeering" interstate robbery statute, carried a maximum sentence of 20 years while the holdup and violation of statutes forbidding theft from interstate charges had a maximum sentence of ten years.

The younger robber, Ashton, brought a suit against the Railroad for \$50,000 in damages for serving the young man whiskey while he was under age, which he claims precipitated the train robbery.

Remi Winston had an internship with MPD in June 2009. She is a student at Archbishop Spalding High School in Severn, MD.

## 19 Indictments Returned Against 2 Train Robbers

Martinsburg, W. Va., May 18 (P).—Two Youngstown, Ohio men face 19 felony indictments here for the train robbery. They are released from 10-year terms in a Federal prison for train robbery.

The Berkeley County grand jury returned the indictments against Luman C. Ramsdell and George L. Ashton yesterday. The two are accused of holding up a Baltimore and Ohio passenger train near Martinsburg.



MPD Privates Lomax and Kennedy receive congratulations from Major [Chief] Robert Barrett after their heroics captured the two bandits from a train robbery in West Virginia.



Police detectives and officers discuss the case near the scene of the arrest in the 2100 block of Pa. Ave., NW in March 1949.

REWARD—Police Chief, who puts his arrest around Pvt. James D. Kennedy yesterday as Policemen of the Month for the capture of two B. & O. train robbers in a

car on track 20 in Union Station yesterday. He was assisted by Lt. Edgar E. Scott (rear), head of the Metropolitan Police robbery squad, who centered the

The Washington Post