



Suffolk Police Sergeant Bugge, who is coordinating the pilot program.

A New Approach To Policing

By Pamela Cordes

If an innovative program designed to get local sector cops more involved in community problems is successful during a six-month trial run, residents, civic groups and business people throughout Suffolk County will be able to work directly with their neighborhood police to solve nagging problems.

The program, called POP — Problem Oriented Policing — has been underway in Selden, Centereach and parts of Farmingville, Ronkonkoma and Holbrook for four weeks. The police officers assigned to the sectors that patrol those communities have undergone a special training course to help them approach problems with a different perspective from the law enforcement one.

Sergeant Brian Bugge, coordinator for the pilot program in the Sixth Precinct, has been studying this method for several years and has observed the program in departments in Virginia and Maryland. The Suffolk POP program is fashioned after the Newport News Police Department in Virginia, and Sgt. Bugge predicts the

program will expand to include most police departments in the next decade.

Although the program may be complicated to start, the philosophy is simple, said Sgt. Bugge: get cops out of their cars into the community as a problem-solving consultant.

He said the program is great for officers, who sometimes are seen as nothing more than report takers, and great for residents, who will get an opportunity to work with their local sector cop to solve a community problem.

Sector cops will analyze problems in their areas and attempt to come up with solutions. They will solicit the help of local residents and work with them and other agencies to get the job done.

Officers will get extra time for problem solving by not answering minor call. A staff has already been assigned to take those reports by telephone at headquarters and precinct houses. Sgt. Bugge offered an example of the concept from when he was on patrol in a local community.

"I had a series of DWI incidents, arsons, a rape and a robbery all in one area of my sector. I sat back and studied the whole picture and realized that

all the problems originated at one corner, where a bar was located," he said. "By working with the community and other agencies, the bar was closed and the problems disappeared."

In Virginia, residents and business owners complained of youths throwing rocks at cars. The sector officer learned there was a rock quarry nearby, so the officer enlisted the aid of a local contractor to remove the rocks.

A survey by a midwestern police department showed that 68 percent of calls placed to 911 were generated by 8 percent of the population. Although similar statistics were not available in Suffolk, Sgt. Bugge said those percentages were similar in other jurisdictions.

"We have become an efficient police department by racing from one call to another, but we have not effectively served the needs of the community," he said.

The program will not cost taxpayers, said Inspector Russell Brown, Sixth Precinct commanding officer. "We are utilizing the manpower we already have. We are making better use of their abilities as officers instead of report takers." ■